

ALIEN
BROTHERS

ALIEN BROTHERS

Volume I

1987

A K/S Anthology Zine

Compiled and edited by

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Foreword

In these pages you will find a wide variety of material, all of it concerning the passionate love between Kirk and Spock, sometimes directly, occasionally indirectly. The contents are arranged chronologically: the beginning of this book is devoted to series-related material, the middle to prequels and sequels to the various Star Trek movies, and the last part includes more fantasy-related material and alternate universes.

There are both humorous and serious stories and poems; there are gentle stories and some with violence, but never unnecessary violence. There are no death stories, or "downers", with one possible exception, nor are there any "tear-jerkers"--overly sentimental, unrealistic stories--nor any "relationship"-only stories, again, with one short exception.

Human nature being what it is, it's certain that not every reader will love everything in ALIEN BROTHERS, but I'm confident that you will find many things to amuse, delight, and enthrall you.

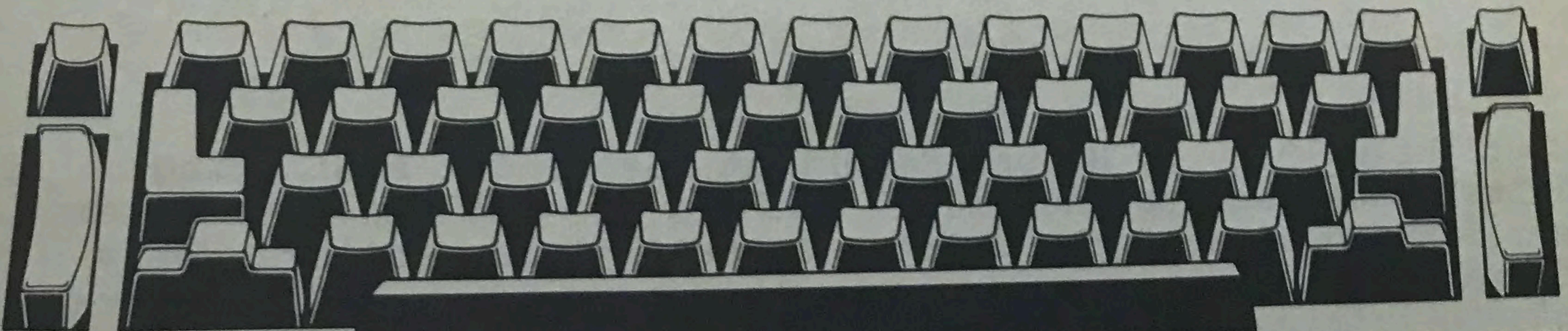
Comments, both positive and negative, are always welcome, and will be cherished.

I want to continue to publish ALIEN BROTHERS, but to do this, I need your contributions. This zine is not a collection of the work of my particular friends and acquaintances. To encourage high-quality contributions, I am offering generous prizes. For further information, see the "Contributor's Guidelines" and Awards. The next volume of ALIEN BROTHERS will be bigger and better, with more variety, more authors and artists, more and longer stories and poetry. There will be more four-color work, also two- and three-color graphics and art. However, I'll do my best to see that the price remains reasonable.

My particular thanks go to my anonymous typist, to all my wonderful contributors, to the Star Trek Welcommittee for their invaluable help, and to everyone who pre-ordered, especially those who didn't complain when ALIEN BROTHERS wasn't finished as fast as they wanted it to be. Special thanks also to those several fans, including Flora, Dale, and (again) my wonderful typist, who tried to help me find a printer in my hour of black despair (Will NO ONE take my money???)

My apologies to everyone for the length of time it took to get this zine printed. As I re-re-write this, I am preparing to take the layouts to my SIXTH printer! And that doesn't include all the many printers all over the country that I called and wrote.

--Helena Seabright



Awards

All contributors should remember that ALIEN BROTHERS focuses on action/adventure, strongly plotted, in a K/S universe. Humor and fantasy are always welcome.

Volume II awards are as follows:

\$200 First Prize, \$100 Second Prize, \$50 Third Prize
for the best Novel or Novelette. (May be humorous or serious.)

\$100 First Prize, \$50 Second Prize, \$25 Third Prize
for the best Artwork (pencil or ink preferred) On any interpretation of Kirk and Spock as alien brothers.

\$50 First Prize, \$25 Second Prize, \$10 Third Prize
for the best humorous short story.

\$15 each for the best three Poems, \$10 each for the three next-best,
\$5 for the third-best Poems.

A special bonus prize will be given for the best poem, story or artwork which uses the concept of Kirk as "quintessential devil" (the Klingon's phrase from ST:IV, of course). This interpretation can be serious, humorous, loving, fantastical--anything your imagination can supply.

Name-the-Zine Contest: A free copy will be given to the best, most useable name for a new non-K/S action/adventure ST zine which I want to publish.

NOTE! All the above prizes will also be offered for the new ST zine!

Prizes will all be awarded after publication. No prizes can be awarded unless enough submissions are received to publish. So, get busy now! You have a year, give or take....

VOLUME I AWARDS:

Art Contest: First Prize, Gayle Feyrer, 203 (to be fair, the black & white was judged)

Second Prize, Mary Stacy-MacDonald, 7

Third Prize, Virginia L. Smith, 272

Poetry Contest: "Dreamwatcher" and "The Lyryst", both by Jenny Starr, and "The Choice" by T'Hera Snaider.
(This contest was practically impossible to judge, due to the many close runners-up: "Masks", "Lament", "So Let It Be Done", "This Sudden Light", "Two-Edged Sword"...and at that point I had to stop, or give awards for every poem. Everyone was a runner-up!)

CONTRIBUTORS' GUIDELINES & EDITORIAL POLICIES

ALIEN BROTHERS is a nonbusiness, nonprofit, amateur fanzine venture, edited and published solely by Helena Seabright. It is not affiliated with or influenced by any other person or persons, clique or group. Contributions were solicited from the best talent fandom has to offer, and were accepted or rejected ONLY on the basis of their quality, appropriateness to the theme, and the feasibility of working with the contributor to obtain a superior result--without strife and acrimony.

This paragraph from my second flyer bears repeating and enlarging upon.

If you are an author or artist, I would very much like to see your work. It doesn't matter to me if you have never been published; I am not just interested in well-known authors and artists. I am interested in high-quality material. ALIEN BROTHERS, Volume I, contains several artists and authors who have never been published, or only published once or twice, usually in obscure places. It also includes several professional writers and artists. Quality is what counts.

Reread this volume; it will tell you what I like better than I can put it into words. I am a perfectionist, and definitely will edit your work. However, I won't alter it so much that you cannot recognize it. I believe that each author's and artist's work is as personal as a fingerprint, and this personal quality should not be removed.

Would-be contributors should note that I am only interested in doing a high-quality offset book, which is time consuming. Also, all decisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of material are my responsibility alone, and they are final. I absolutely refuse to engage in fannish politics, and insist on remaining as fair and impartial as possible. If anyone tries to force me into such a situation, I will refuse to deal with that person in any way. This has already happened once, so be forewarned!

All contributors using pseudonyms MUST inform me in writing of exactly what name they want used, and under what circumstances, if ever, they want their real names revealed.

All contributors will be asked to sign an agreement releasing first publication rights to me. This is standard procedure in professional publications, and has become necessary in ALIEN BROTHERS because of certain unethical behavior of one contributor. Notice the copyright on the title page. Violators of the copyright law endanger not only their own reputations, but also the existence of amateur publishing. It is a serious matter.

Please note that after the deadline for contributions is past, I will not under any circumstances except the demise of ALIEN BROTHERS either accept more material, or release material already accepted and return it to the contributor. The reason is simple: it is very unfair not only to me as editor, but also to my typist, artists, graphic designer, and to would-be purchasers. If I churned AB out on my basement photocopier, then perhaps it would not matter so much. But, I don't!


All contributors will receive a free contributor's copy of AB. Artwork will be carefully packed and returned when the printer is finished with it. AB is not a reprint zine. Normally, I won't run reprints, and unless pre-arranged, such work won't earn a free copy of AB. That also certainly applies to material that was published previously, in violation of the copyright law.

A word of encouragement: remember that, as a contributor, you are expected to make mistakes. Don't let it worry you! It's your job to make 'em, and mine to find and correct 'em!

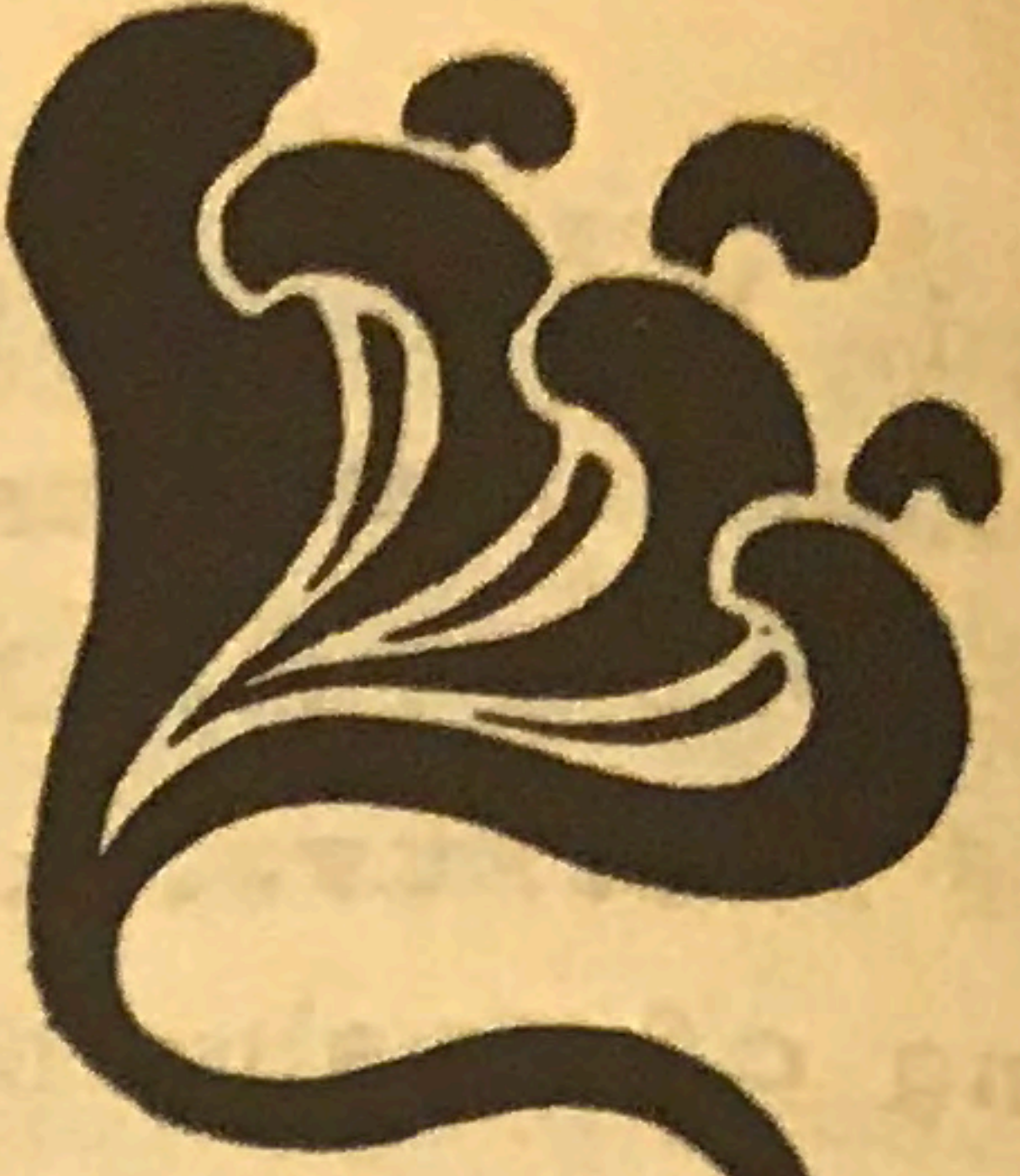
And a final word: Remember to always send a SASE (Self-Addressed, Stamped Envelope) with all inquiries, always! (And ye shall be blessed....) And remember to allow plenty of time for a reply from the overworked editor.

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All errors and omissions are strictly unintentional!



THE RING OF SOSHERN

by J. Guttridge

Written probably before 1976, this story has never before appeared in a fanzine. It is one of the first--and certainly the best--"underground" K/S tales, circulated very privately and discretely in manuscript photocopies only. RING OF SOSHERN set the pattern for many early K/S stories, and had many imitators, but none surpassed it. The British author is well known for her sensitive and accurate character portrayals, and skillful handling of plot, action, description, and unusual themes and ideas. A collection of her stories has recently been printed by ScotPress.

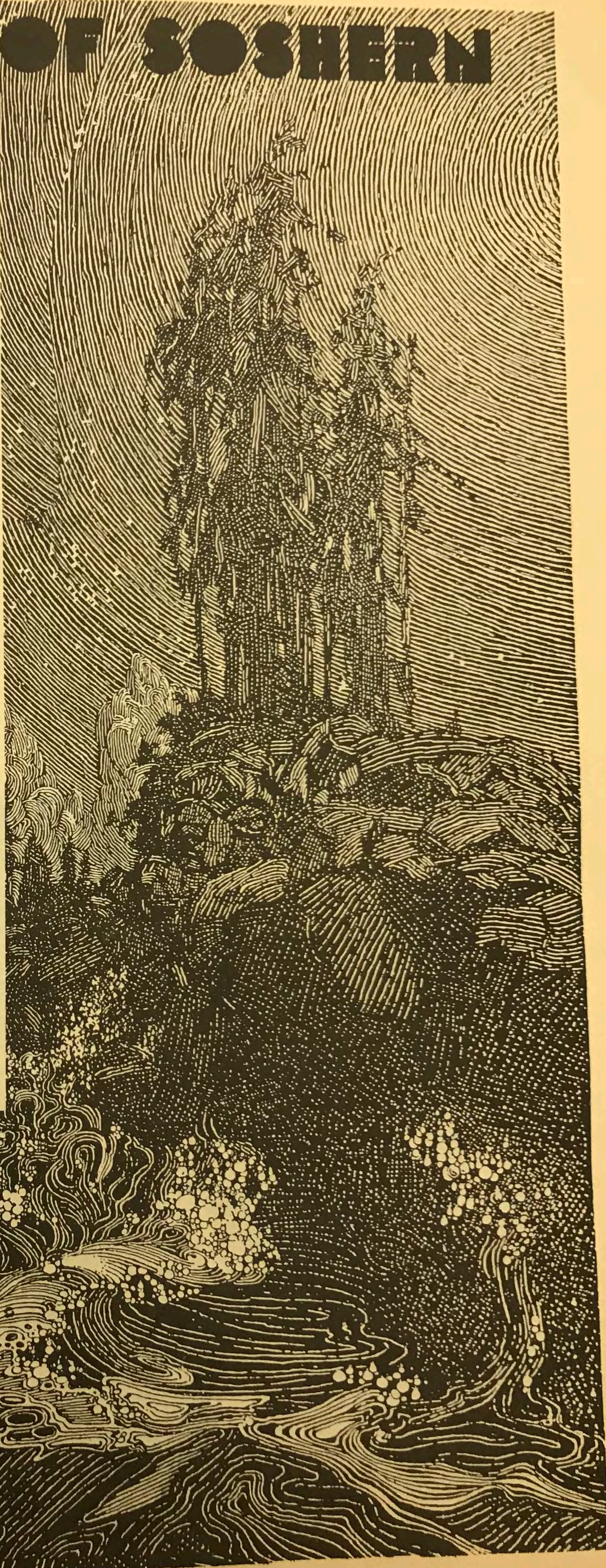
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Kirk and Spock materialized side by side on a grassy hillside. At their feet the valley spread out like a realistic relief map. There were rolling meadows spotted with flowers, a broad slow-moving river and a dark forest that reached all the way to the horizon. The sky lay over the land like an inverted brass plate, its rim resting on the most distant mountain top. There was an air of stillness, almost of brooding: no birds sang, no insects buzzed among the flowers and not a breath of wind disturbed the grassheads.

Kirk breathed deeply and expanded his lungs with oxygen-rich air. "A beautiful place, Mr. Spock. It's a pity we don't have time to make a more thorough investigation."

Spock looked up from beneath lowered eyebrows and frowned at the horizon vista. "We have exactly two hours and thirteen minutes before the ion storm reaches this system."

"And by then we have to have the ENTERPRISE a long way clear, I know," Kirk sighed. "What about those mysterious sensor readings you picked up in space?"



Spock studied his tricorder. "A most curious phenomenon. They emanate from a single isolated region a little over half a mile distant. In that direction." He indicated the shoulder of the hill.

"Well," Kirk squared his shoulders, "It's a lovely afternoon for a walk and we do have the time. I suggest we take a look."

Spock nodded his assent and the two men started out diagonally across the hillside, their shadows preceding them and the sun scorching their backs through their shirts. They walked in almost complete silence, exchanging only an occasional comment. Kirk studied the endless panorama, while Spock paid much more attention to the tricorder, but both enjoyed the opportunity to stretch their legs and breathe the fresh air. The journey was completed all too quickly. They were approaching the final rise in the land when Kirk's communicator beeped.

He stopped and flipped the device open. "Kirk here," he said.

"Scott here, sir." The Engineer's voice came down from the starship, sounding puzzled. "I hate to alarm you, Captain, but there's been some sort of mistake in our calculations."

"Mistake, Scotty?"

"Aye. I just ran a check on that ion storm. It's a lot nearer and travelin' a whole lot faster than we thought. I have to beam you up at once. It'll be on us in less than seven minutes!"

Kirk looked anxiously for the Vulcan who had gone on ahead and was just vanishing over the rise. "Stand by to beam us aboard and warp out of orbit," Kirk ordered, and snapping the communicator shut, he broke into a run.

The ground sloped sharply upwards towards the top of the rise and Kirk used his hands to pull himself up the last few feet. He mounted the crest and looked down for the first time at the source of the curious sensor readings. There was a depression or basin filled with fine white sand, and thrusting up through the ground were a number of spiky, purple-veined crystalline formations. Spock was on his knees before one of them inspecting it with his tricorder.

"Spock!" Kirk slithered down into the hollow. "We have to get back to the ENTERPRISE. There's been a miscalculation regarding that ion storm. It's on top of us!"

Spock neither moved nor spoke, but remained on his knees before the crystal as if praying to some outlandish idol, his head bowed over the tricorder. Kirk

put a hand on his shoulder. "Spock? Spock, what's the matter?"

Slowly the Vulcan looked up at him, and Kirk saw that his face was quite blank, his lips slightly parted, his eyes emptied of all intelligence. Horrified, Kirk shook him hard. "Spock! Snap out of it, man! Spock!"

Spock toppled forward and lay on his face in the sand. Bewildered, Kirk stood up and stared about for some agency that might have caused the Vulcan injury. And then he heard the noise--or not so much heard it as felt it and saw it. Bright spots flashed and exploded in front of his eyes. A sensation he had never experienced before rippled the fabric of his mind. He clasped his hands to his ears and tried to silence the sirenlike singing that filled his skull. His mind became empty. Thought and memory ceased--it was impossible to think. He dropped to his knees, his hands clutching vainly at the sand and then, insensible, he collapsed, twitched once and lay still, one outflung arm across the Vulcan's back.

* * * * *

"Scott to Captain Kirk," Scott said with patient urgency into the command seat speaker. "Scott to Captain Kirk. Come in, please!" No one answered and Scott sighed with exasperation.

"What's happened to them, Scotty?!" McCoy demanded as the wrinkles in his face deepened with concern. "Why don't they answer?!"

"I don't know, Doctor." Scott shook his head. "I just don't know. An' we can't wait around here any longer in order to find out. Mister Sulu, prepare to leave orbit."

McCoy gripped the Engineer's arm. "Scotty! You can't go off and leave them down there! They could be in desperate trouble!"

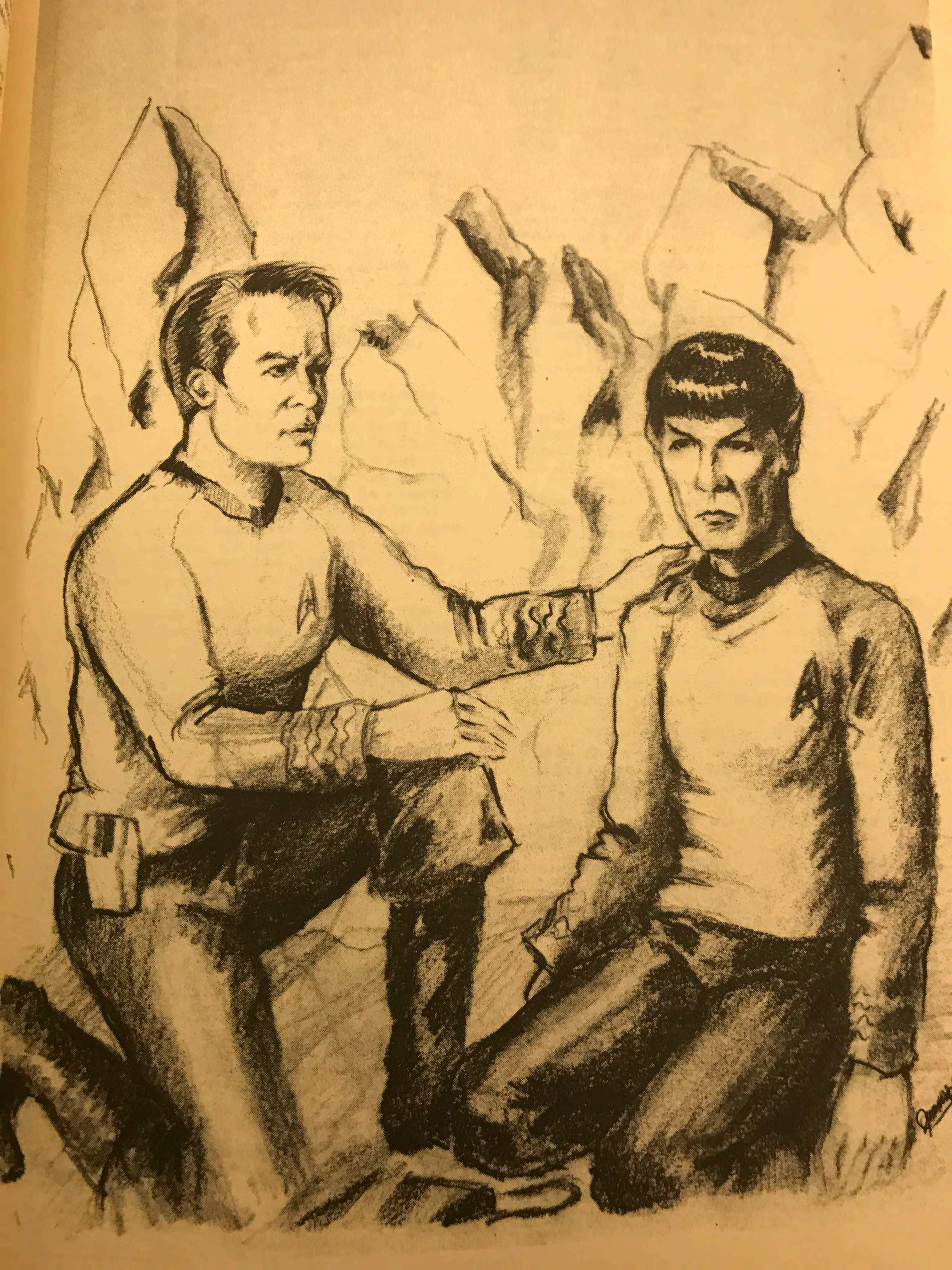
"Aye, Doctor, they could at that, but one thing's for certain, if we stay here we'll be the ones in desperate trouble. There's a force nine ion storm bearin' down on us, an' right now it's at best two minutes away. A blast of that intensity would rip this ship apart in seconds!"

"All right!" McCoy banged a clenched fist down on the arm of the command chair. "But can't we at least beam down a security detail?"

"We canna, Doctor. We just don't have the time! Lt. Uhura, is there any word?"

"No, Mr. Scott. And interference is increasing on all channels."

"That's it, then!" Scott sat down in the command seat. "Warp us out of orbit, Mr. Sulu. Factor Six. We'll get back to this planet as soon as we can, Dr. McCoy, but for the time being we've



got to run before this storm for as long as we can, and when it catches us we'll have to try to ride it out."

The ENTERPRISE trembled, and then lurched as if someone had struck her a mighty blow. For a moment the lights dimmed and McCoy clung to the command seat as the bridge tilted. Scott cocked an eyebrow at him. "It seems as if it's caught us already," he said.

* * * * *

Kirk opened his eyes. There was an insane shrieking in his head and all he could see were vivid, exploding lights, but somehow his thinking was crystal clear. He struggled onto his knees and groped blindly all around him. He felt only sand. A trace of desperation crept into his thoughts as his senses began to slip once more. He stretched out his arms, feeling the ground around him in the widest possible circle. His fingertips touched something warm and yielding: the sleeve of the Vulcan's shirt. "Spock!" On hands and knees he crawled to him. "Spock, come on!"

Spock didn't respond. Desperately, Kirk gripped him beneath the armpits and heaved. The Vulcan's body was a dead weight. It was impossible to shift it more than a few inches at a time. But Kirk shifted it. Feeling as if his heart or his head would surely burst, he dragged them both up the side of the depression. There was sand in his hair and in his eyes and in his mouth. He spat it out and rolled them both over the lip and onto the descending bank.

The Captain lay on his back in the cool grass, panting. The sweat dried and left a coating of grit on his skin. His eyes stared blindly at the sky. And then he blinked and frowned. The flashing lights were becoming fewer and less brilliant, and the singing in his ears was dying away to a sigh.

He sat up. His eyes were beginning to function more normally. His vision was darkened, as if he had just stepped out of bright sunshine into shadow. He shook his head to clear away the last of the singing voices. Spock was lying beside him, spreadeagled on the grass and covered with the powdery sand. Knowing how that grit could torture, Kirk bent over him and dusted as much of it as he could away from his eyes.

"It's all right now, Spock. Wake up," he urged. Spock remained lifeless, although to Kirk his breathing seemed normal and the rapid fluttering heartbeat low down in his left side was strong. Kirk unhitched his communicator, blew on it to dislodge the sand and called the starship. "Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Scotty." The undisciplined hiss of static responded at once, but that was all. It was then that Kirk noticed the length of the shadows and the way in which the sun hung like a brazen ball above the horizon. They had lain senseless many hours.

Automatically glancing heavenwards, Kirk put the communicator away and returned his attention to Spock.

As he had seen McCoy do in the past to revive Vulcans from their near death healing trance, he slapped him across the cheek, gently, not wishing to inflict pain. Spock remained stubbornly still and white-faced. Kirk gritted his teeth and hit him again, much harder. A small spot of blood appeared at the corner of the Vulcan's mouth and he stirred, his back arching. Kirk shook him. "Come on, Spock! Come out of it!"

Spock opened his eyes and looked at him, puzzled, and then, with a little assistance he sat up, tucking his legs under him.

"Are you all right?" Kirk asked anxiously.

Spock blinked and the vacancy faded from his eyes. "I believe I am... undamaged, Captain." He touched the back of his hand to his mouth and looked with interest at the smear of blood.

"I'm sorry I had to do that," Kirk said. "We were both knocked cold by something down there. I got you out but I couldn't bring you round."

"Yes. A most interesting phenomenon. Some emission from those crystalline forms stimulates certain neural passages in the brain beyond endurance. It would seem that you have a partial immunity, whereas I have none. A further investigation...."

Kirk held up a hand. "There will be no further investigation, Mr. Spock. Immunity or not, neither one of us is going anywhere near that formation."

"In that case, Captain, I suggest we return to the ENTERPRISE and...."

"The ENTERPRISE is gone. Someone made an error in estimating the speed and proximity of that storm. When Mr. Scott lost contact with us he must have taken the ship to safety. We'll have to fend for ourselves until he gets back here."

Spock looked up at him. "That could be weeks, or even months, depending on the damage the ENTERPRISE sustains," he said slowly.

"Indeed it could, Mr. Spock. We must consider ourselves fortunate that this planet appears to be well endowed." Kirk turned and looked towards the river and the forest. "If you're well enough to walk, we'll be most likely to find shelter and something to eat down there." He looked at the Vulcan with a twinkle in his eye. "I'm afraid the food is more likely to be animal than vegetable."

Spock, on his feet now, shook his head. "Thank you, Captain, but I do not believe I am hungry," he said stiffly.

Kirk laughed and set off down the hill. For two seconds Spock looked after him, his hands clenched into two white fists and his eyes burning with a deep consternation, and then he followed, running to catch up.

The downhill walking was easy despite the ankle-length grass that tended to ensnare their feet. The cups of the bright flowers leaned towards the horizon as they spread to catch the last rays of the sun, and the dark line of trees drew steadily nearer. They were the most curious trees and the shape of them stirred ancient memories in Kirk's mind. They had fat brownish stems covered with an intricate all-over spiral pattern of scales and were topped with bunches of finely divided fronds.

In less than an hour after setting out from the hillside, Kirk and Spock reached the banks of the river. Its water was clear and dark and icy cold and it ran lazily over a bed of fine gravel and small rounded stones. Standing beside it, listening to its gurgle and looking at the trees on the opposite bank, both men again became aware of the brooding silence.

Over their shoulders the sun touched the horizon and its brassy light turned to a more mellow gold. Spock looked over his shoulder at the sunset and its light gilded his features and threw his eyes and the inner surfaces of his ears into black relief. He looked gaunt and Kirk frowned at a peculiar passingly faint expression that crossed his face, but when the Vulcan turned towards him again the glimpse was gone and the features placid.

"We don't have a great deal of time before dark," Kirk remarked. "We'll have to press on if we want to find somewhere secure to spend the night. That looks promising." He pointed along the river bank to a copse of the strange trees that grew on their side of the water.

Spock nodded and without another word Kirk started out.

It was beside the slow, wide waters of the river that they saw their first examples of planetary life. On the far bank, sprawled in the last rays of the sun were a large number--thirty or more--of beasts indistinguishable from terrestrial crocodiles. They were enormous; the smallest was twenty feet in length and they lay so still they resembled blackened, rotting logs.

Kirk called a halt at the first tree and peered into the dimness beyond.

The copse centered about a hollow that in the rising evening damp smelled brackish. The grass of the river bank swiftly gave way to moss. It was soft under foot and formed an unbroken carpet between the trees. The secondary growth was stiff and spiky but an occasional almost normal-looking bush bore pale,

hard-shelled fruits and Kirk and Spock each collected a handful in the hope that they might be edible. If they were not, there was a strong possibility that they would go hungry to bed that night.

They found a place where the bank sloped steeply up from the water and made a high, dry place beneath the overhang of the trees. There was a bulky cushion of moss which would make an adequate bed and the river provided fresh water in abundance. The men took considerable pleasure in dousing their faces and drinking deep. Kirk tipped a cupped handful over the back of his neck and looked up at Spock. The Vulcan's fringe was damp and water dripped off his nose. He shook the drops off his hands and straightened, looking again towards the sun. It was a vast red orb now, the lower edge of its disk corroded by the horizon hills.

It was then that they heard the noise from the forest on the far side of the river. First of all there was a crash, as if something the size and weight of a mobile fortress had collided with and demolished several trees. And then the thing roared. It began with a rumbling groan and built swiftly into a full-throated bellow. The starship officers stood beside the water and looked towards the thick penciled edge of the forest. There was absolutely nothing to be seen and the noise did not come again, but the atmosphere had changed subtly. No breeze had risen to stir the tree fronds but it was distinctly cooler and the river distinctly grayer. Downstream, the crocodiles took to the water one by one. The waves from their noses and their powerful, lazily-moving tails made dark ripples.

Utter silence followed the noise and into it Kirk murmured, "What in the name of all that's holy was that?"

Spock shook his head. "Unknown, Captain."

"Whatever it was, let's hope we don't meet one at close quarters."

"There may be other creatures of an unfriendly nature in the vicinity. A fire should keep them at bay."

"Good thinking." Kirk flexed the tension out of his shoulders. "There were a couple of fallen trees back there. Let's go and collect whatever's dry enough to burn."

By common consent the two men remained close together as they collected the bark and the dried fronds and carried them to the river bank. They completed the final trip just as the sun took its final plunge to oblivion over the hills. The world became abruptly and entirely gray, devoid of all color, and almost at once the first star began to shine.

They had accumulated enough fuel to keep a small fire burning throughout

the planet's eleven hour night. Kirk set light to a small pile of bark with his phaser and they sat as close to it as they could get, not necessarily for warmth, for it was not yet cold, but for comfort and protection against the encroaching night shadows.

Spock cracked one of the fruits open between two flat stones. Inside was a soft kernel and a small pit. He tasted the flesh cautiously, prepared to spit it out at the first acidic burn. It was sweet and not unpleasantly flavored, and as the tricorder had indicated that it contained no known poison he proceeded to crack the rest of the shells and the two men ate. The shells burned with a bright flare and for a few minutes the darkness receded.

"I don't understand," said Kirk, musingly, "how we could have made a mistake like that."

Across the fire from him, Spock raised an eyebrow. "Captain?"

"Our equipment is infallible. The prediction and measurement of ion storms is a basic starship function. I don't see how we could have slipped up this time, unless there was a major sensor malfunction."

"The figures were correct, as they came from the computer," Spock said evenly.

"I don't doubt that. But what about the input?"

"I relayed it myself directly from the sensors."

"Then perhaps there's something wrong with the auto-relay system. There was once before..."

"I relayed the figures manually."

For long seconds silence lay between them like a thick blanket as both stared into the flames thinking his own thoughts.

"You've never relayed an incorrect figure in your life." Kirk said at last, slowly. "There must be a malfunction in the ionic intensity sensors. There's no other explanation."

"If that is so, then the ENTERPRISE is, at the moment, in severe danger."

Kirk looked up at the brightening stars, preferring not to think about that possibility but finding there was no alternative. "Scotty'll handle it," he said with more conviction than he felt. "He'll fix her up and bring her back."

Spock said nothing. He lowered his eyes and stared broodingly into the fire.

"In any event," Kirk went on after a long pause, "there's nothing we can do."

There's no point in sitting here worrying." And he sat there and continued to worry.

The night was two hours old when the twin moons rose above the eastern horizon and began their slow and stately dance across the sky. They were a matched pair, equal in size and both a delicately pale shade of pink; and they swung about each other and about their common center of gravity in orbits that never quite intersected. Kirk watched the moons until they set again in the west, and Spock watched the fire, occasionally adding more fuel when the flames burned low.

They decided to sleep in turns and Kirk elected to take the first watch. The night was very dark after the moons had set, and the silence was broken only by the whisper of flowing water below the bank, and once a plop and a splash as an exuberant fish leapt far out in the river. The men were reluctant to leave their small flickering circle of firelight, even for the most necessary of personal needs, but eventually Spock lay down on the mossy cushion, curled up with his knees almost touching his chest and lay half on his face. It was a peculiar position, but he apparently found it comfortable for his eyes closed quickly and his breathing slowed and steadied as he drifted into sleep.

Kirk put more bark on the fire and looked up at the stars, wondering where the ENTERPRISE was and what was happening to her. Once word kept creeping into a corner of his mind: Foolproof. It was both stubborn and insistent and no matter how often he slammed the door shut on it, it came knocking again. Foolproof was what Starfleet said its latest ionic sensors were, and hitherto, when Starfleet claimed something to be foolproof, that's just what it was. Acknowledging that, there was only one remaining possibility: that of a simple Vulcan error. Kirk avoided the inevitable admission for as long as he could, but finally his own scruples wrung it out of him. It was more likely for Spock to have made a mistake than it was for the ionic sensors to have malfunctioned.

He looked over at the huddled Vulcan. Was it possible that this man, this friend, who had worked with precision-accuracy for so many years, had made an error a first-year cadet would have been ashamed of, and in so doing marooned himself and his Captain on an isolated and unknown world and sent his ship flying into danger?

Spock stirred and tossed restlessly, turning onto his back. Kirk poked the fire moodily and then looked at him again as he sighed loudly and moved his head from side to side. Kirk frowned. He was no doctor, and no specialist in racial norms, but he had seen Spock sleep many times before and never had he witnessed this fitful slumber. He got up and walked over to where the

Vulcan lay and looked down at him. He appeared to be dreaming. Behind the closed lids his eyes were active and his hands constantly clenched and unclenched as though he were fighting--or more accurately grappling--with someone of his own imagining.

It occurred to Kirk that he might be ill, might have suffered some detrimental effect from his encounter with the strange crystals on the hillside, but he, Kirk, had also been affected and he had not suffered. He touched the Vulcan's cheek with his fingertips. There was heat there, but not a feverish burning. It was merely the normal Vulcan body temperature raised a little by sleep and the active dreaming. Somewhat reassured but still concerned, Kirk returned to the fire to await the second rising of the twin pink moons.

Spock woke of his own accord at exactly the moment that the first moon reappeared in the sky. Catlike and without undue display, he stretched his body and went down to the river to wash. If he were aware of his own tossings and turnings he gave no indication of it, but as he sat down opposite Kirk, the Captain noticed that his face was unrested. In the shifting, unflattering light, the skin of his face was drawn tight across his bones.

They exchanged places. Spock settled down beside the fire to keep the second watch while Kirk went off into the trees to relieve himself in private. Returning, he lay down on the moss bed to sleep, but slumber was a difficult mistress to lay that night. Unlike the Vulcan, he was unable to switch his mind off when he wished to stop thinking and the thoughts rolled on: his fears for the ENTERPRISE and his crew somewhere adrift in the unimaginable void between him and the stars that shone so brightly above his head, his concern for themselves and their survival in this uncertain and possibly hazardous situation, and now a new niggling worry insinuated itself. A worry that centered about Spock. The more Kirk thought about it the more certain he became that the Vulcan was solely responsible for producing the wrong estimates from the computer. Now Kirk was forced to wonder to what extent he could trust the man's judgment in the future. Had the error been a one-shot, or could it happen again with lethal consequences?

The pink moons had danced their way half way across the sky before Kirk eventually slept, and even then he did not sleep for long. He was already half awake again when he heard Spock calling him urgently.

"Jim. Jim!"

Kirk came to his senses with a start. Spock was on his feet beside the fire, his attitude tense and alert. The firelight glinted on the phaser in his hand. Kirk joined him.

"What is it?"

Spock didn't answer. He was staring out across the river and into darkness where the forest lay. His dark eyes saw more than Kirk's, but still they saw nothing. His ears strained, their up-swept points for once serving the purpose for which evolution had formed them: sifting the night sounds. Kirk followed his sightless gaze and he, too, listened. Only the surface of the water moved, whispering in the darkness.

And then they both heard a sound. It was a heavy sigh, as if some large creature expelled its breath, and it was close at hand. Kirk unhitched his phaser and adjusted the setting. "Prepare to defend yourself," he said quietly.

Spock drew away from him a little and the two men stood side by side looking downstream toward the place the sound had come from. It did not come again. Instead there was a loud splash and a gurgle as a vast body entered the water. From the far side of the river came a challenging roar that shattered the night into a thousand pieces. At once the creature in the river answered, its bellow loud enough to make the listening men wince. There was a great deal more splashing as the creature moved away from the bank, and the very ground trembled as the beasts roared in unison. There was a mighty thud on or near the opposite bank and a crash as if armour plates collided. And then came the continuing sounds of a ferocious struggle.

Clearly they heard the snap and clash of monstrous teeth, the grunts and snarls and roars of battle, and occasionally a bellow of pure pain. Kirk and Spock subsided and huddled close to their fire. There was nothing for them to do but gaze into the flames and listen to the roaring and the clash of bodies as the combatants raged back and forth along the river bank. They were bystanders who wanted no part in the perpetrated violence.

The moons had set for the second time and the dawn was promising when the conflict eventually ended with an almighty splash as one of the participants fell from the disputed territory into the river. The victor roared its triumph to the stars, and then bit by little bit, the silence of the night crept furtively back.

The two starship officers remained close to their fire until the first daylight appeared. From time to time they heard the creature's challenging roar, but although it seemed to be moving away into the middle distance, Kirk no longer had any wish to sleep. With the first lightening of the sky the stars began to fade and in a short while a mist rose up from the river to shroud the battlefield from the eye of the sun. They took it in turns to use the privacy of the woods, and afterwards, while Spock performed his intricate and particular ablutions, Kirk went to investigate the damp hollow.

There was a small inlet from the river and the ground was marshy under foot.



Two or three trees had fallen into the pool of stale water and lay half buried and rotting in the mud. The mist swirled thickly and it was both damp and cold. Kirk shivered. Ostensibly looking for food, Kirk picked his way round the swampy patch.

Something wriggled out from beneath his feet. Almost tripping and looking down in alarm, he saw some black eel-like shapes slithering away from him through the black mud and into the water. He had no opportunity to catch one. It was then that he heard Spock call him. He made haste to retrace his steps but the ground was treacherous and to avoid slipping he had to place each foot carefully.

By the time he returned to the river the sun was edging above the eastern mountains and the sky turning from gray to pink. The shadows had retreated and the mists were lightening across the river. Spock was standing at the water's edge looking towards the further bank. He was still without his shirt and his tricorder was in his hand.

Kirk saw at once what he was looking at. A little downstream, half in and half out of the water, was an immense curved mountain of gray flesh.

"Is it dead?" Kirk asked in a low voice.

"Yes, Captain. Quite dead."

"So that's what the noise was all about," Kirk moved along the bank to get a closer look and Spock trailed after him with the tricorder.

As the rising sun burned away the mist they could see more. The thick tree-trunk legs that had supported the vast body in life, an array of angular bony plates either side of the backbone and a blunt tail armoured with spikes. A ruff of frilled bone protruded from the water but the fearsome head was completely submerged. The thick grayish hide was torn and streaked with blood. Several great hunks of flesh were missing from the shoulders and flanks, and the river water that flowed past was discolored.

Kirk scowled at the dead beast and then at the fronded trees, the empty plain and the birdless sky. "I think I'm beginning to understand what sort of a planet this is," he said.

"Indeed," Spock nodded. "That would appear to be a terrible lizard."

Kirk agreed. "A dinosaur, similar to those that ruled the Earth in the early Cretaceous period. We must take pains to keep out of their way, Mr. Spock."

Spock slung the tricorder from his bare shoulder. "I understand they were singularly stupid animals."

"Maybe. But when that much weight is coming at you, it doesn't make any difference if it's controlled by intelligence or sheer momentum. The best thing we can do is find something to eat and move out of here in case whatever did that comes back for its breakfast. There were some eel things in the inlet. Let's go and see if we can catch some."

Spock collected his shirt and followed Kirk down to the swampy patch. The black eels had wriggled back out of the water and were again basking in the mud. Despite the fact that they were without eyes, they proved remarkably difficult to catch. Spock, with his natural caution, took two by stealth and snapped their heads off with a flick of his wrist. Kirk, always the more impulsive, caught one by pure luck and was as surprised as the luckless eel. He dispatched it messily and lunged after another. He slipped and skidded in the mud, clutched at a bush which came out by the roots in his hand, floundered into the water with a startled yell and found himself sinking rapidly.

"Spock! Spock, for God's sake get me out of this!" he yelled.

To Kirk's suddenly terrified and racing mind the Vulcan's reactions were extraordinarily slow. He straightened and turned, frowning; assessed the Captain's predicament and began to make his way back to a point where he could assist without becoming trapped himself. In all it could have taken him only one second, but to Kirk, with the mud speedily sucking him down, it seemed distinctly as if he hesitated.

Spock found himself a solid footing, crouched and leaned out, extending a hand towards his Captain, now chest deep in the mire. Kirk's fingers brushed his and slipped away. For a moment the Vulcan's face filled with bewilderment and horror. This time Kirk, despite his increasingly desperate plight, was certain of it. Spock was hesitating, unsure of what to do next.

"The tricorder strap!" Kirk shouted. "Throw me that!"

Spock straightened up and unslung the tricorder, and threw the strap out across the mud. Determinedly keeping his head, Kirk reached out and twisted it securely round his hand. "Now, slow and easy, pull me out," he said levelly, having realized in an instant that for some reason this man was not the confident and competent Vulcan he was so used to working with. Fortunately, there was nothing wrong with Spock's ability to obey orders and again fortunately, the tricorder strap proved equal to the task. Up to his chin now, Kirk ceased to struggle against the mud and let Spock do the work. As he emerged, he spread his weight across the surface. Reluctantly the mud yielded its possessive grip and the Vulcan's strength drew him towards the solid land. At last they were able to lock their hands about each others wrists and Spock pulled him clear of the mud and onto the bank.

Kirk panted heavily and gradually he regained his equilibrium, and then he tried to clean some of the mud from his clothing. It was a hopeless task. He looked up to find Spock crouching beside him with eyes anxiously fixed on his Captain's face and the tricorder clutched pathetically against his chest. He was apparently very much aware of his own shortcomings. Kirk didn't trust himself to say anything about the incident at that exact moment. The rank stench of the mud was too fresh in his nostrils and there was still a hard knot of fear in his belly. Instead he stood up shakily and pointed to the slain eels. "Bring those and we'll find out if they were worth all that trouble."

Turning his back on the inlet, the eels and the Vulcan, he made his way back to the river bank where he stripped off his clothes and washed both them and his body in the icy water. He took his time over it, allowing himself an opportunity to think. He had no doubt at all now that his First Officer's behavior patterns were aberrant, but what the cause of that aberration--or more to the point, its cure--might be, he had no conception. He resigned himself that in the future he would have to watch out for them both. He wrung out his shirt, put it back on and returned to the fire.

Spock had found some way to clean the eels and was staring moodily at them as they cooked over the embers. Kirk sat down opposite him and turned the eels over. They were cooked through and he offered one to the Vulcan.

Spock drew back and shook his head in refusal.

"Why?" Kirk asked, continuing to hold out the food.

"I do not eat flesh."

"You do when you have to. And right now you have to."

"No."

Kirk lowered his hand. "Are you sick?"

"No." Spock seemed unsurprised by the question. "I am not unwell, Captain. I am, as you might say, sick at heart." He met Kirk's eyes. "I fear I have been lax in my duties and in my responsibilities. I have endangered the ENTERPRISE and you, personally. I can only apologize and assure you that there will not be a reoccurrence."

Disarmed, Kirk sighed. "If it's not going to happen again we don't have to worry about it. Now, eat some of this. We have to do a lot of traveling if we're going to move away from neighbors like that," he jerked his thumb at the carcass across the river. "You'll need your strength."

Spock pursed his lips and nodded, picked up the eel and chewed dutifully. Kirk followed his example and almost spat it straight out. It had the texture of foam rubber and tasted strongly of mud. Neither of them was sorry that a diversion prevented them from finishing their meal.

On the far side of the river the trees parted like reeds and an apparition charged out of prehistory and into reality. It ran upright on powerful hind legs and carried its comparatively feeble arms out in front of it. Its head and jaws were immense, its reptilian eyes small and the whole was balanced at the back by a massive dragging tail. Its jaws parted to show row upon row of hideous teeth and it roared its challenge to the sky.

Kirk kicked dirt over fire and food alike and with great speed they took to the concealment of the trees. The newcomer threw itself ferociously upon the carcass of its dead and much larger adversary. There were open wounds in its sides that still bled from the battle of the previous night, but these did nothing to diminish its appetite. It worried at the dead flesh with teeth and talon until it tore a great bloody hunk from the haunch.

"It's time we were on our way, Mr. Spock," Kirk said. "We'll follow the river upstream for as far as we can. It'll prevent us going round in circles."

And so they slipped away through the trees and left the beast with its bloody feast. They set out along the river bank, two figures dwindled down to insignificance by the scope of the landscape around them.

The sun left the cradle of the mountains and crawled up into the sky, growing smaller and brighter as it went. The sky changed to a deep shade of blue and in the distance there were a few wisps of clouds. The river flowed slowly past on their left and along the opposite bank the forest kept pace with them, a dark line sometimes nearer, sometimes farther, but never very far away. Many times they heard roars and bellows from among the concealing trees and once they saw the bulk of a gray body moving just at the fringe of the forest.

The walking was easy, but after a while Kirk found that the Vulcan was lagging behind. All morning he had been walking in preoccupied silence with bowed head and downcast eyes that paid no heed to the passing scenery. Kirk said nothing, but his unease increased. Despite the Vulcan's verbal reassurance, he was obviously far from his normal self.

Towards mid-morning they were forced to detour away from the river to avoid a clan of crocodiles basking in the sun on their side of the river, and it was while making the diversion that they saw the herd of white deer. They were far away across the plain--white blobs against the green swathe. In size, not much larger than a

medium-sized dog with humped backs and small heads. They were very shy. The instant they caught the men's scent they were away, bounding in great leaps towards the horizon. Kirk stopped and stared after them in puzzlement.

"If this is the early Cretaceous period, those creatures can't possibly have been mammals," he said.

"They could, Captain," Spock corrected. "This is not your Earth. It may be that here the reptiles and the mammals have evolved side by side, or even that the reptilians have avoided extinction altogether and persisted into a later age."

"You could be right. Anyway, those animals might be tastier than eels--if we can ever get close enough to kill one."

It was almost midday when their path rejoined that of the river. The temperature had risen steadily all morning and now the sun was directly over their heads beating down without mercy. The sky had taken on a brassy tint and there was no longer any sign of cloud. Kirk was sweating, his shirt marked by dark stains and there was a film of moisture even on the Vulcan's skin. Lack of sleep and their early start, together with hunger made both men weary. Kirk called a halt in the shade of some prickly bushes and they sat down to rest through the heat of the day. The empty ache in their bellies was a problem, but not an insurmountable one. They wrapped their knees round the pain and quickly fell asleep.

Kirk woke almost an hour later, roused by a strange cry from the river. Looking down into the water, he saw an outlandish serpentine shape swim by, propelled by broad flippers and with a disproportionately tiny head that occasionally broke surface. A large fish jumped clear out of the water to escape it.

The Vulcan slept on beside him and Kirk could not help but notice that he looked ill. His eyes were ringed around by dark shadows and his cheeks were sunken. Kirk worried over him and decided that a good meal was probably what he needed. He remembered the fish and went down to the water's edge.

The river was shallow here and he found he could wade a long way out before the water reached the tops of his boots and he got wet. A dart of movement caught his eye and turned him to the right; another swung him back to the left. The fish were impossibly swift. Kirk changed his tactics. Instead of going after them, he lay in wait without moving until a large specimen swam within reach, and then he grabbed it smartly by the tail.

The fish proved to have very sharp teeth and was quite prepared to use them.

Kirk was scratched and bleeding by the time he'd manhandled it to the bank and dragged it out of the water. Soaking wet yet again he dispatched it with a sharp stone and sat down to gut it.

When Spock awoke it was to the smell of fish cooking over a small fire of sticks. Kirk grinned at him as he sat up and pinched the sleep out of his eyes.

"Lunch," he said, gesturing to the fish. "When you've washed up it'll be ready to eat."

Spock looked from him to the fish and without a word got up and walked down to the river. Kirk looked after him, mildly disappointed at the reaction. He hadn't exactly expected Spock to dance with joy, but.... He sighed. He wasn't quite sure what he had expected, but there was an obvious and increasing tension within the Vulcan that Kirk knew from past experience boded ill for them both.

Spock spent a long time beside the water and when he eventually came back he looked damp and a little better. In silence Kirk handed him half the fish and watched him intently as he ate it. Spock was too preoccupied to notice the scrutiny.

"It's going to get rougher from here on," Kirk said when they were down to the bones.

Spock looked upstream, assimilating the change that was coming over the landscape. "We should be able to stay with the river for the rest of today," he said with a notable lack of enthusiasm.

"When we get into the hills we should find somewhere to make a permanent camp easily enough, and there might be more to eat." Kirk looked at the sun, estimated the time and got up to kick out the fire. "There's bound to be small game, and berries and things for you. We should make out...."

Behind him the Vulcan moved swiftly. Kirk turned in time to see him vanish among the bushes, totally ignoring the thorns, and then heard him vomiting as he emptied the contents of his stomach onto the ground.

Kirk gazed morosely at the river and faced facts. It seemed that despite his denial Spock was sick and the chances were that he would get sicker. Kirk's knowledge of medicine was that of a layman. On a starship, everything in advance of basic first aid was left to the ship's doctor. Kirk thought wryly of what a certain ship's doctor would think of that premise.

He knew that if Spock sickened he would have to provide basics: food and shelter close to an adequate water supply, and for a Vulcan in particular the maintenance of a high body temperature was essential. All these things meant that they had to reach the hills before Spock

became unable, or possibly unwilling, to travel.

Spock returned, his composure and dignity restored but his face a deathly white. Kirk looked at him helplessly. "Are you in pain?" he asked.

"No, Captain. No pain." Spock lifted his eyes to the horizon. "If we are fortunate we should be able to cover several more miles before sunset."

"We might even reach the hills, if you're up to walking that far."

Spock nodded. "I can walk. I am not ill."

It was the second time he'd said it, and on the evidence Kirk found it all but impossible to believe. "All right," he said guardedly. "Let's try it."

They walked on, making the best time they could although Spock walked only slowly, seemed sometimes almost to limp. Subtly the countryside changed. The naked undulations of the plain gave way to hummocks and small dales, sometimes clothed with bushes and an occasional copse of trees, sometimes not. They saw more of the small white deer, but as before they bounded away before the men came within the stun range of their phasers. Gradually the regimented fronded trees were replaced by more normal evergreen species, although across the river the forest continued as enigmatic as ever in its new form.

The golden orb of the sun was dipping towards the horizon and the men were breathless and approaching the end of their endurance when they reached the foothills. For some time the river had been flowing more swiftly with reeds and rushes growing in heavy-headed clumps in the shallows, and strands of weeds waving like pennants in the current. Now they came to a place where the side of the hill had been split open by some immense internal pressure to expose the underlying rock. At the far end of the chasm was a cliff of darker, harder rock over which the river plunged in a spectacular and noisy waterfall. Beneath the falls were a series of deep, all-absorbing pools and from there the river ran swiftly on over a bed of light-colored sand before gushing out of the hillside and beginning its long journey across the plains. Boulders of every size were scattered in disarray throughout the chasm and in the walls were several dark openings that looked invitingly like cave mouths. To two dirty, tired, and hungry men it seemed that they had reached the promised land.

Without pausing for rest they extended themselves to the utmost to climb the shale slopes and clamber into the security of their chasm.

It was regrettable that they were not alone in regarding this singular and secluded niche as home, and the original

occupants viewed their arrival as a gross intrusion of privacy.

Kirk climbed over the last ledge and stretched, and looked around him with satisfaction. The sun was beginning to set and the rock walls were flooding with its blood-red light. The boulders and every last little stone cast a long, intensely black shadow, and it was warm and quiet. Kirk looked back to see how the Vulcan was faring and it was then he saw in silhouetted shadow the rising of the Phoenix.

Turning and looking up he saw the creature itself, standing in its nest on the clifftop and stretching away its disturbed slumber. It was a sick parody of a bird. It had a bird's body with a skinny mobile tail. Its head was round and birdlike with bright reptilian eyes and a long, savagely serrated snout. The wings it spread in turn like curtains against the sun were leathery skin stretched taut between elongated finger bones. It possessed not a single feather and flight seemed impossible until it launched itself from the cliff with a loud, infuriated squawk that rattled back from the rock surfaces in a confusion of overlapping echoes. It swooped down into the chasm with a heavy grace and only then did Kirk get a true estimate of its size; twenty-five feet from wing tip to wing tip.

With a cry of fear and warning, Kirk stumbled back. He saw the broad wings tip, the needle-sharp teeth in the jaw, the hooked talons on its feet. He fell backwards just as the creature struck him. It was a glancing blow to the shoulder, but enough to tear cloth and flesh. The force of it knocked him flying and he landed on his back with a yelp of pain. Agony lanced through his arm, and he felt his arm growing wet with blood, but he was incapable of helping himself, or doing anything but watch the bird-parody sweep round in a great circle, maneuvering adroitly in the close confines of the chasm and turning to come in for another low level attack.

Stunned, flat on his back in the open, Kirk reflected that he hadn't done a very good job of looking after himself--or his officer. In a dazed sort of way he realized that this would be the last attack. Unable to move, he watched the sinister shape grow against the darkening sky, heard the creaking flap of its wings. Then, as he braced himself for the final, dreadful tearing of flesh, a curious thing happened. The creature stopped dead in mid-flight. It was engulfed from wing to wing in a glowing green light that penetrated to its very bones. And then it was gone. The sky was empty as Kirk lapsed into partial unconsciousness.

Spock rehitched the phaser and ran to his Captain's side, heedless of the risk of a twisted or broken limb. Kirk was breathing, but the sleeve of his shirt was torn and soaked in blood. For a time forgetting his own pressing problems, Spock ripped out the sleeve



of his own shirt and bound the edges of Kirk's wound together. Had he been Human he would have cursed as his fingers fumbled clumsily with the knots. The makeshift bandage soaked through with blood in a moment, but the flow did begin to slow down.

Kirk gripped Spock's arm feebly with his other hand. "More! More of them!" he cracked.

Spock looked up, his lips drawn back and his eyes squinting as he examined the heavens and the cliff tops for more ominous bird shapes. "There are no others at the moment, Captain."

"There will be!" Kirk struggled vainly to sit up. "There'll be at least one more. The things mate!"

"In that case we need immediate shelter." Spock unhitched Kirk's phaser and pressed it into his hand. "I won't be long," he said, and left Kirk alone.

In turn he carefully examined each of the caves and selected the most suitable for a semi-permanent abode. It had a narrow, defensible entrance and an interior large enough for two men to live in reasonable comfort, and yet small enough to be heated by a small fire should the weather turn cold.

He hurried back to Kirk and found that the Captain, weakened by blood loss, was almost asleep. Another search of the sky revealed nothing but rapidly approaching night. The sun was already out of sight below the horizon. Spock took Kirk's uninjured arm around his shoulders and half carried, half walked him to the chosen shelter.

They had no bedding, and no material for a fire, and as it was now dark he could not go in search of either. He made Kirk as comfortable as he could on the bare earth and then settled himself down between his Captain and the cave entrance.

It grew very dark, and except for the constant rumble of the waterfall, silent both inside the cave and out. If he strained his ears to the utmost, he could detect the lighter sound of the river, but that was all.

So Spock sat in the darkness and considered the prospect of his death.

He was undismayed by it; he had seen the dark lady many times and in many different guises. On more than one occasion he had been aware of her presence close to his own bedside. It was in the manner of dying, and without emotion he reflected that his was to be the most unpleasant and lacking in dignity that he knew of.

He had been well aware of the changes as they took place inside him. The signs were unmistakable and no educated Vulcan could fail to recognize them. The outcome had been inevitable from the start, but

somehow the correct opportunity to inform his colleagues had never arisen. It was not the sort of thing one announced casually. He regretted deeply having endangered the starship and her crew through his own preoccupied carelessness, but for his own part he was thankful for the opportunity to die in private--alone except for Kirk, and Kirk had been a part of his life for so long that there were times when he barely seemed like a separate person at all. The pain and the indignity of his death would be known by his friend, and by his friend alone. That would be an end to it, and, he reflected, that was the way it should be. A lonely grave on a lonely world was a fitting conclusion to the life of one such as he.

He wondered briefly what Kirk would do afterwards. For a Human, the loss of a friend could be a traumatic experience, but the Captain, he assured himself, had a resilient personality. He would find consolation in the company of his other friends, and he would not grieve for long.

Thus consoling himself, Spock composed his mind and spent the night deep in contemplation while his Vulcan eyes and ears remained alert and guarded Kirk.

Outside the cave the twin moons danced twice across the sky, and when the first pale rays of dawn touched the eastern sky, Spock stirred and carefully stretched his cramped muscles. Behind him in the darkness of the cave, Kirk slept on, snoring softly. Spock could just see him, his injured arm outflung and the other folded across his chest. Spock felt an odd wave of fondness flow through him. At this moment Kirk, whom of all people Spock cared for most, resembled nothing so much as a little child.

He went outside and inspected the chasm in the new daylight. It was cool and still filled with night shadows, but the river and the pools below the waterfall reflected the rosy grayness of the sky. A single tree of unknown variety flourished just outside the cave and down towards the water there were bushes and grass in abundance.

Spock started down towards the river with the intention of washing, but at once an intense feeling of fullness--of ripeness--welled up from a place deep inside him. Sweat broke out on his skin and his vision blurred. His head felt thick, disconnected from the rest of his body and he clung to the tree for support as he became nauseated. It was the first overpowering demand that heralded the dreaded Vulcan curse of irrationality. For the second time in his life he could only observe helplessly as his body responded to the strong sexual drives of the pon farr.

In a strange, detached way he was glad that it had started so much sooner than he'd anticipated. It would be ended before the ENTERPRISE could return. He did not want them to see him like this.

The usually inert glands in his neck--those responsible for so much of Vulcan desire and Vulcan pleasure--filled and distended in anticipation of a woman's caress. His breathing shortened and he became aware of a new tightness in his trousers as the lowest and most delicate region of his body responded to the release of hormones. He pressed himself so hard against the tree that it hurt.

Long minutes later the insatiable, unreasonable demands of his body receded to a dull ache of unfulfillment in the pit of his stomach. He was left drained and leaning weakly against the tree as his breathing and the pounding of his blood steadied. Scarcely able to walk, he somehow got himself down to the river and sluiced his face. The neck glands, still swollen and sensitive, were too tender to bathe. The brush of his own fingers sent a fresh shiver of longing through him.

He removed his clothes and washed meticulously, despising himself for the sensations he created. Although the temptation was great, to satisfy oneself was futile, and somehow unclean. He rinsed his clothes and put them on again, still damp, and then made his way along the river bank to the first and shallowest of the pools. The sun peeped above the rim of the cliffs and in its light he saw fish lying deep below the surface.

His thoughts turned to Kirk. In a matter of hours now the Captain would be alone, and with his injured arm he would find it difficult to provide himself with food. Spock felt a twinge of responsibility. They had no way of knowing how long it would be before the ENTERPRISE returned. Spock began to collect a bundle of thick, straight reeds that grew at the water's edge.

A long time later Kirk stirred and opened his eyes. The bright daylight that flooded into the cave made him squint. He moved to throw an arm protectively across his eyes, said "Ouch!" loudly and subsided to consider the pain that lanced through his shoulder. Looking down, he found his shirt torn and blackened with blood, and a piece of Spock's uniform bound tightly round his upper arm. Vaguely he recalled a dark and sinister shape that had swooped down at him out of the evening sky. The memory made him sweat.

Although the arm was stiff and pained him when he moved, his fingers seemed to function normally and they were their usual pink color. He dared hope that there was no permanent damage. Apart from the sore arm he was extremely hungry and there was a crick in his back that necessitated immediate movement. He gritted his teeth and kept the injured arm as still as he could as he sat up, and then climbed cautiously onto his feet. The roof of the cave was just high enough to allow him to stand upright. His head

spun and the rock room tilted crazily as the blood loss asserted itself.

There was no immediate sign of Spock, but from outside came a steady chuck-chuck sound that indicated his whereabouts. Kirk went to investigate.

Spock was sitting cross-legged on a boulder, his pale, intent face making him look more than ever like a pixie shoemaker. Around him were scattered a collection of reed stems and it was on one of these that he was working; carefully chipping away at the bamboo-like material with a sharpened stone.

He looked up and cocked an eyebrow as Kirk emerged into the sunshine.

"Good morning, Captain. I trust you slept well?" he inquired formally.

"Better than I deserved, thank you, Mr. Spock." Kirk stretched as well as he was able, scratched at his stubble and surveyed the chasm with increasing satisfaction.

"It looks as if we hit the jackpot again," he said.

Spock looked at him gravely. "If I understand you correctly, Captain, I agree. We have been most fortunate."

"You do understand me correctly." Kirk looked up at the brazen sky. "All we have to do is hope that we don't run into any more of those winged nightmares."

"I've seen no sign of any," Spock said, bending his eyes once more to his work.

Kirk looked over his shoulder with interest. "What are you making?"

"I am attempting," said Spock with the exaggerated patience of one addressing a small child, "to devise some means of catching the fish that inhabit yonder pool."

Had he been anyone else Kirk would have called his tone insolent. He pursed his lips and looked out at the river and thought about it. His fears of the previous day returned fullfold. This, again, was not the man he had known so well for so long. It was a facet of the character that had until now been turned away from him.

The steady chipping continued, Chunk-chunk. Kirk discovered that his arm was aching, and that he felt sweaty and unclean. "I'm going to wash," he announced briefly and set out down the shale slope towards the river. Spock hesitated, gazing after him morosely, and then the chipping resumed.

Beneath the rags and the blood, the wound in Kirk's arm was a jagged tear. Had they the facilities, it should have been stitched. The raw flesh began to weep blood again as he bathed it. He

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rinsed the stale blood out of the bandage and tied it in place once more, using his teeth to fasten the knot. He could do no more for his torn shirt than for his torn arm. He spread it out on a rock to dry and, barechested, returned to the cave.

The sound of the Vulcan's labors sounded throughout the chasm. Chunk-chunk-chunk. He did not look up as Kirk approached.

By now the Captain was beginning to feel extremely hollow, and he could see nothing in the way of food readily available. He picked up one of the sharpened reeds and weighed it in his hand.

"I'll take one of these and catch us some breakfast," he said.

"They are not finished yet," Spock retorted bluntly.

Kirk inspected the shaft and point with close attention. "They look fine to me."

Spock stopped what he was doing and looked up at him narrowly. "They are not yet finished," he repeated in a low voice.

Kirk met his eyes and the wills of the two men conflicted. Kirk lowered the makeshift spear. "I think they are," he said. "I'll take this one and get some food."

In one movement Spock was off the rock and virtually at his throat. He snatched the reed away and splintered it over his knee. "I say they are not!" he snarled into Kirk's face. "They are mine! I made them! They will not be used until I permit it!"

Kirk held his gaze levelly. "What's the matter with you?" he asked. "You're behaving like some sort of savage!"

For a long moment Spock merely stood and glared at him, his eyes two burning pits of hatred. It seemed as if he might be steeling himself to thrust the jagged ends of the reed into Kirk's face. Then the Captain noticed a thing he had never seen before. The Vulcan's tightly clenched hands were trembling with increasing and uncontrollable violence.

The tension between them snapped. Spock hurled the reed away from him and fled, heading towards the waterfall and swiftly vanishing among the jumble of boulders. Kirk stared after him, feeling sick inside and weak at the knees. He felt very much as if all his values had been abruptly turned upside down and emptied out at his feet. Shakily, he picked up one of the reed spears and tested the tip with his thumb. He had never known Spock to behave with this sort of irrationality. Whatever was wrong with the man?!

Kirk stood debating whether to go after him and risk a possible violent

assault or remain where he was and wait for him to come back of his own accord. Neither course would be entirely satisfactory. He looked at the sky, estimating the time as midday. He would give it an hour...the thought stopped and Kirk squinted, looking almost directly into the sun. Yes--he had been right! There was something up there, a dark speck growing rapidly larger--and taking on a sinister and well-remembered form as it descended earthwards.

As Kirk watched, the winged reptile circled once, high above the chasm and its strident call carried down on the still air. Obviously it was searching for the mate Spock had destroyed the previous evening. It swooped low over the rim of the cliff, its leather wings creaking stiffly as it flew. Kirk stepped back into the shelter of the cave, but the beast's bright eye was not fixed on him. It was watching something else among the linked pools at the foot of the waterfall.

Spock!

The thought leapt into Kirk's mind and in the same instant he was running.

The creature's hellish shadow raced ahead of him across the boulder-strewn slopes. The wings worked more slowly as it banked and glided lower, preparing to strike with outstretched talons.

Sweating and breathless, Kirk scrambled to the top of the last scree slope. A long way below, beside the deep, still water of the pool, he could see a tiny figure; it was Spock, still running and apparently unaware of his danger. Kirk opened his mouth to shout, but he knew the sound of his voice would not carry above the roar of the waterfall. Slipping and sliding, he hurled himself headlong down the slope in an avalanche of small stones and dust.

At the last possible moment Spock turned, alerted perhaps by the black shadow of the beast, or the rattle of its wings. As he turned he fell, his body still moving in the direction of the water. As if in slow motion Kirk saw his hand come up, his phaser tightly clasped and aimed. Spock fired, and somehow, impossibly, he missed!

Kirk raised his own clenched hand and found to his dismay that instead of his phaser he still gripped the sharpened reed. There was no time to correct the error. He hurled the spear as if it were a javelin, heard its flight whistle shrilly through the air and heard it strike flesh with a dull thud.

The creature tumbled out of the air, somersaulting over Spock's prone body and smashing into the ground with sufficient force to break its neck. It lay flailing, the splintered stump of the spear protruding from its eye socket and thick, dark blood pumping out over its head and neck.

Kirk completed his reckless slide and ran to the huddled Vulcan. Apart from the green smear vividly staining his cheek, Kirk could find no immediately detectable injury, but Spock was shuddering from head to foot and his face and neck were flushed. Kirk rubbed his hands and arms vigorously.

"Come on, Spock! It's gone now! It's dead!"

Spock didn't respond. Beside the pool the reptile's body convulsed, its wing tip thrashing mere inches from Spock's head. Kirk smelt the stench of carrion from its gaping jaws and retched. It was not a pleasant place to be. He retrieved Spock's fallen phaser and scooped the man up in his arms. Cradling him like an infant, he carefully retraced his headlong steps back to the cave.

Spock didn't seem to know him. He was burning with a peculiar kind of fever and his eyes were glazed and rolled upwards in their sockets so that only the whites showed. The shuddering continued unabated.

Kirk laid him carefully on the floor and bit by bit stripped off his torn clothing. There were no broken bones and no blood except for the graze across his cheekbone. Kirk examined each rib and probed the Vulcan's skull and found nothing to cause concern. He concluded that Spock had finally succumbed to the mysterious ailment that had been affecting his judgment and reactions for days past. Certainly his face remained dark and congested and there were swollen glands in his neck.

Kirk found himself with a difficult decision. Food was a necessity, both for himself and to maintain Spock's strength. He could go now to hunt, leaving Spock alone; or he could remain with him and risk being forced by hunger to desert him when his condition might be much worse. Looking down at his officer, he concluded that there was not a lot he could do for him if he did remain. Apart from the almost continuous tremors and the film of sweat that covered his body, Spock might have been insensible.

Reluctantly then, Kirk left him. Outside the cave he paused to gather up the remainder of the reed spears and considered the most likely source of food. There were the fish in the deep pools, but between them and himself lay the winged saurian, still threshing in its death throes. Occasionally he heard a strangulated squawk above the roar of the water. He had no choice but to leave the chasm and search for a supply of food on the plain below. Without more ado he set out down the shale slopes and followed the river to the place where it gushed out of the hillside.

The plain roasted in the midday sun, its middle distance lost in a shimmer of heat haze and its horizon a dazzlingly bright line. After its energetic leap down from the chasm, the first mad rush of water carried the river more than a

mile and then it slowed to a lazy dawdle and meandered back and forth between reed beds and bushy banks. It bent and oxbowed, leaving a muddy patch where once water had flowed. After his earlier experience, Kirk steered well clear of the mud and splashed across the river at a sandy shallow place. He was sweating profusely and his injured arm pained him after the strain of carrying Spock. The wound had broken open again and the bandage was stained with blood. Still without his shirt, his skin was tingling and beginning to brown.

Far away across the plain he saw another herd of the white deer, apparently playing hop-scotch with each other. Their images were indistinct and wavered in the heat. Unfortunately, they were a long way out of phaser range. Kirk gazed after them wistfully and returned his attention to the forest. The trees were quite still, the fronded varieties and the evergreens alike, like caricatures painted on canvas. No breath of wind stirred their stately branches, not even at the uppermost levels. The shadows beneath the canopy were dark and forbidding and the silence hung, a thick curtain of anticipation between the trees. There was an air of pregnant expectancy.

Clutching his bundle of reeds, Kirk pushed his way through the fringe of the forest and stood among the trees. Underfoot there was a dense matting of moss that deadened every footstep. He scarcely dared draw breath for fear of breaking the spell of silence.

Something brushed against his cheek. Kirk jumped violently and put up his arms to defend his face as an immense dragonfly blundered past on busy, rainbow colored wings. Kirk followed its crazy zig-zag course through the forest with a cautious step and eventually it led him to a secret pond deep in the trees. The water was thick and scummy and it smelt. There was no life here, of that Kirk was certain--and therefore he was doubly surprised when something grunted in the overgrowth of rushes at the water's edge. Whatever it was, Kirk considered that in some degree it must be edible. He unhitched his phaser and stalked it. The creature grunted again and a blunt furry head poked out of the rushes inches from Kirk's face--its bewhiskered nose twitching.

Startled, Kirk stunned it with his phaser and finished it off with the spear. It was ratlike, had webbed feet and a tail that looked as if it had been hammered flat with a mallet. It was plump to the point of roundness and promised good eating. In a nest in the rushes Kirk found two half-grown young ones and had no compunction in killing them also. Together, the three animals would keep Spock and himself fed for several days. With a measure of satisfaction, Kirk gathered them up by the tails and prepared to start back for the river.

A thunderous roar filled to capacity the space between the trees. Kirk spun

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around. From the far side of the pool two dull red eyes regarded him from a hideous countenance. He glimpsed a vast body, standing erect, a dark elephant-like skin, smelt the stench of putrid breath and saw strings of decaying flesh hanging from jaws lined with sharp inward-pointing teeth.

He was already running when the beast roared again. He heard a crashing of trees and undergrowth behind him; he didn't waste time looking back. Gripping the spears and the creatures tightly, he fled towards the river and soon left the disturbance behind him.

He had almost reached the river bank when he was certain that he heard a man shout. It was unmistakably a man's voice, although it had a bestial quality that made it almost a prolonged grunt. For a fleeting instant Kirk thought that Spock had somehow in his delirium followed him down from the chasm. He dismissed the notion at once. By no stretch of the imagination could the voice have been Spock's, and besides, when Kirk had last seen him Spock had been incapable of going anywhere.

Despite the cold sweat of fear that remained from his encounter in the forest and his anxiety to return to the chasm and the side of his sick officer, Kirk's curiosity insisted that he investigate. After all, he assured himself, it was in the best interests of them both that they were aware of their immediate neighbors. With every ounce of caution he could muster, he crept towards the bend of the river. The reeds and the bushes that grew at the water's edge did much to conceal him. He moved silently to a point that overlooked the mud flat, and carefully parted the bushes.

There were a group of six creatures standing on the river bank. They wore no clothing but their bodies were covered in long, matted hair. They stood erect like men, but their broad shoulders were stooped forward and their heads hunched down between them. Their humanity was tempered with a great deal of the beast. In their bunched fists each carried a collection of spears made in a similar crude fashion to the way Spock had produced the ones he now held himself.

Below them, belly deep in the river mud, was a vast creature, gray and rough-textured with a small head atop a serpentine neck. Its teeth were blunt, denoting it as a plant eater, and its eyes set on the side of its head. A hunted, rather than a hunter.

In a conversation of guttural grunts, the primitives were apparently deciding how best to kill it. Kirk would dearly have liked a share of its flesh. Carefully he started to withdraw, the compulsion to return to Spock not allowing him to remain to witness the outcome. The branches snapped back with a crack and a rustle. A loud shout of alarm came from the apemen and Kirk suddenly found himself the unwilling center of their attention. Waving their spears and screaming abuse, they

started to climb the bank with agility. Kirk decided that it was time to vacate the area with the greatest possible speed. He snatched up the creatures and the reed spears and started running.

The blood sang a loud song in his ears and his lungs strained. His booted feet pounded out a rhythmic tattoo along the river bank. He gained no ground on the pursuing subhumans, and he began to miss the blood he had lost the previous day. The ape-men looped along behind with great ease, occasionally using the knuckles of an overlong hand and arm as a third leg. Gradually they began to catch up.

Kirk reached the shallow crossing place still just ahead, and made a final desperate lunge into the water. A spear whistled past close to his right ear and splashed into the water ahead of him. At any moment he expected to feel the agony of a shaft in his back.

And then the aggressive shouts turned to cries of alarm. From the fringes of the forest came a crash and a roar. Floundering chest deep in water, Kirk dared to glance back. He saw the erect meat-eater of his earlier acquaintance emerging from the trees. Kirk forgotten, the ape-men scattered, hurling their spears at the brute while it pursued its selected prey remorselessly in great bounding hops.

Kirk heard a terrible shriek as he emerged, dripping wet, on the far bank. Looking back he saw only five man-creatures remaining and the monstrous beast turning towards another of them with slavering, bloodsoaked jaws. Weary and feeling mildly sick, Kirk retreated towards the distant hills and chasm that was home.

Spock emerged from his feverish coma with a start. He was naked and lay on the earthen floor of the cave in a bath of his own cold sweat. Every movement brought a fresh wracking of pain and his lower body was uncomfortably swollen, almost erect. His limbs twitched and jerked with uncontrollable muscular convulsions. His blood scorched its way through his veins. There was one thought alone that remained clear in his mind. He had to get away from this place--away from Kirk--before the dreaded plaktow changed him into the insane lust-driven savage that had been his most distant ancestor. He dragged himself to his knees and crawled to the cave entrance.

Stiff and dirty and inestimably tired, Kirk returned to the chasm. Somewhere in his mad flight from the apemen he had lost the reed spears, but he still clung to the rat-creatures and regarded the day's hunting with a flush of self-satisfaction. He found it a little disconcerting to discover that there were

hostiles in the vicinity that possessed at least a rudimentary intelligence, but he was not unduly concerned.

The moment he reached the bottom of the shale slope he could see that something was wrong. He threw down the dead animals and raced recklessly up the bank of loose stones, clawing at them with his hands to give himself extra speed.

Spock had not gotten far. He clung to the tree that grew outside the cave, his arms wrapped tightly about it and his unclothed body crushed so hard against it that he appeared determined to press himself into the wood itself. His body shook, a pronounced and continuous shiver, and his eyes were tightly closed.

"Spock! Spock, what is it?!" Kirk demanded, reaching the tree and trying desperately to unlock the torturous grip. "What's the matter?! Are you in pain?!"

Spock managed to shake his head and his face contorted. "Get away from me! Get away before I kill you!" he intoned through clenched teeth.

Kirk took him by the shoulders. "I don't intend to leave you again. Come inside before you catch cold and...."

Spock released the tree, swung around and hit him squarely in the face. Kirk staggered back, lost his balance and sat down hard amid a small avalanche of stones. His lip was split and blood ran brightly down his chin. Spock came after him, his eyes quite insane and his clawed hands reaching for Kirk's throat, bent on murder. Kirk rolled and Spock staggered on past him, his movements uncoordinated. Aware of the Vulcan's strength and with self-preservation uppermost in his mind, Kirk came quickly to his feet and with braced, interlocked fingers chopped down hard across Spock's neck. Spock fell heavily, stunned, and that gave Kirk a chance to regain his breath and his wits.

Spock started to get up, using his arms as levers. There was a jagged stone clenched tightly in his hand and no trace of reason left in his face. He was intent upon smashing his Captain's skull.

Kirk swung a fist at him, connected somewhere beneath the Vulcan's jaw and snapped his head back. The blow stopped him for only a moment. Kirk found himself with his back to the long drop to the river. Breathing heavily, he waited for the inevitable rush, and plowed in with fists flying. Spock faltered with a bleeding nose and broken lips and Kirk seized his opportunity. He brought his knee up hard in the Vulcan's crotch, smashed his fist into his jaw as he doubled up, and followed through with a sharp blow to the solar plexus. Spock retched and began to fold. Kirk stepped forward to catch him and lowered him carefully to the ground.

Kirk knelt beside him and disbelievably studied the dark glandular shadows in his neck. Surely it couldn't be--but looking down he saw the Vulcan's distended genitals and knew that there was no mistake.

Gently he gathered the man into his arms and carried him back into the cave. Spock subsided onto the floor with a sound that might have been a sob. Kirk used the Vulcan's own shirt to wipe away the beads of sweat that formed so quickly on his body.

"Spock," he said with quiet, insistent firmness, "do you hear me? Spock!"

Spock's head rolled towards him and his eyes were lucid and filled with anguish. "Jim?"

"I'm here." Kirk dabbed at the blood on the Vulcan's mouth and wiped that of his own away on his arm. "Spock, can this possibly be what I think it is? The pon farr all over again?"

Spock sighed and nodded and his face twisted again. "I tried! Tried to fight it!"

"I thought it was only supposed to happen once in every seven years?"

A shake of the head. "A fallacy. And besides--I am not a normal Vulcan."

"You're half Human, but...."

"That makes no difference." Spock's hands clenched and he shuddered. "For me--the first pon farr was never broken, only suspended. When I thought you dead...."

"I understand that," Kirk nodded slowly. "The shock upset the hormone balance. But how...? The question is, what are we going to do with you until the ENTERPRISE gets back? There's a Vulcan colony in the Serapis system. At warp nine...." He was thinking aloud. Spock laid a damp, shaking hand on his arm.

"No, Jim. It is not--possible. Already the blood is fire in my veins. I burn!"

"There must be something we can do! We must stop it! Delay it until the ENTERPRISE gets back!"

"No." Spock's eyes closed and he shook his head. "There is no way. For me all that is left is death." He gestured to his body. "This death."

Kirk ground his teeth. "If only the ENTERPRISE were here!"

"I'm glad she is not. There is nothing they could do but watch me die."



10/10/20

"The Serapis colony is only two hours away...!"

"I have no woman at the Serapis colony."

Kirk stared at him. "But they wouldn't let you die! Someone would...wouldn't they?"

"Mate with me to save my life? It would do no good." The burning pain returned in a wave that ran the length of the Vulcan's body. Kirk felt it make every muscle jump. Spock gasped, "You do not understand! T'Pring was my woman. As children we were joined as one. T'Pring is half a galaxy away--and she belongs to another!"

Kirk's face filled with horror. "You knew this would happen when you gave her away?!"

"It was a possibility."

For along time Kirk was silent, watching his friend suffer. "It isn't logical," he said at last.

"No." Spock's eyes closed for a moment and he shuddered. "It is not. But it cannot be altered. Jim!" He gripped Kirk's arm tightly, raising himself up. His eyes burned into Kirk's. "You must escape, or I will surely kill you!"

Kirk refrained from telling him that he'd already attempted just that. He dabbed away the fresh beads of sweat. "I saw you through this once before and I'm not leaving you this time," he said determinedly.

With a sudden upsurge of strength Spock gripped him by the arms and dragged him down until their faces were just inches apart. "Are you so stupid that you do not understand?" he hissed. "I will not survive this! I am dying! And if you remain you will die also! At my hand! You will leave. Now! And you will not tell me where to find you!" He pushed Kirk violently away and the Captain landed on his back on the other side of the cave.

Kirk got slowly to his feet and looked down at the Vulcan's face. Spock had forgotten his existence. His face ran with sweat and the glands in his neck were bruised swellings. The rest of his body was shuddering and unrecognizable as belonging to the refined and polished individual Kirk had known of old.

Kirk left the cave and went out into the evening light. His legs were unsteady and his thoughts were in turmoil. Spock--his friend and companion through so many hazards--was dying! And there was nothing in the universe that he could do to prevent it!

The sun was sinking into a pit of fire below the horizon. For the first

time since their arrival there were clouds in the sky and the sunset was streaked with red and orange and pink. To Kirk, the chasm had taken on a dreamlike quality--gold lit and, except for the noise of the water, utterly silent. Dazed, scarcely thinking, he collected a supply of dry kindling and lit a small fire in the mouth of the cave. He went back down the shale slopes and picked up the animals he had killed so long ago--on the other side of disaster. Sitting beside the fire in the reddening light, he cleaned them and skinned them and set the flesh to cook. The scent that rose quickly from the meat was enticing, but Kirk, who had been so hungry, had no appetite. The thought of eating made him feel sick.

He found that the time-honored adage of keeping busy was no help. From time to time as the world around him darkened he heard Spock move, sigh, groan, in the cave behind him, and his mind returned constantly to the one unalterable, terrible fact. For the want of a woman for whom he cared sufficiently, the faithful Spock was going to die.

Kirk gave up trying to occupy his mind and dwelt upon the subject. The concept was a strange one, but in an alien way it was logical. One man and one woman selected as consorts, one for the other. The male bidden to mate or die. Curious, he reflected, how the females seemed scarcely affected. He remembered T'Pring's haughty, stony-faced rejection of Spock at the place of the challenge. It was she that had condemned him to death, and for that Kirk found himself hating her. The one woman for whom Spock had cared enough...Kirk halted that thought and examined it with the utmost care. Somewhere the basic premise was not quite correct. As far as he knew, Spock had never expressed any personal sentiments regarding the Vulcan woman. She had been a fact, a facet of his life, and he'd accepted her as such, but affection--no. The only person for whom Spock had ever shown genuine affection was Kirk himself.

Kirk sat and gazed into the fire a long time, and thought about that. It was a simple fact. It had been remarked upon many times that Spock's attachment for him went deeper than that of any other Vulcan for his commander, and considering that he was a halfbreed Human, brought up in the stilted, strait-jacketed confines of a Vulcan childhood and adolescence, it was not to be wondered at if the development of normal emotional and sexual attitudes had been hindered. Any normal Vulcan, having won T'Pring, would have taken her and used her. Spock had not. Kirk wished fervently that he'd paid more attention to McCoy's frequent and lengthy lectures on Vulcan, and particularly Spock's, psychology. Those words of wisdom might well have proven useful now.

The pink moons were well risen in the sky when he got up and went again into the cave. Spock was still alive, his breath rattling in his throat. In the faint light of the fire Kirk saw him stir as he approached.

"Jim?" The Vulcan's voice was a whisper. "Why did you come back?"

"I haven't been anywhere to come back from," Kirk told him matter-of-factly, and sat down beside him. "I've been thinking about this problem of ours."

Spock's eyes glinted in the flicker of the firelight. "The problem is mine, and its solution is already certain. Go away from me, Jim!"

"I've been thinking," Kirk said again. "Your joining with T'Pring made the two of you as one person, much as a Human becomes united with the woman he loves. Is that right?"

"There is no comparison."

"If you loved a woman," Kirk persisted, "And she accepted you into her bed, would that fulfill your need?"

"I don't know! There is no woman!"

"No," Kirk said slowly, "but you... love me."

Understanding flared at once in Spock's eyes. "No!" It was a cry of anguish.

Kirk leaned over him and took him firmly by the chin, pulling his head around so that he had no choice but to meet his eyes. "Do you want to die like this?" he snarled, "In this sort of agony?"

Spock's breath hissed, "It is the way of my father's people. The unmated male must die!"

"It's illogical, it's stupid, and it's wasteful!" Kirk hissed back. "You have one of the best scientifically creative brains your father's race has ever produced, besides which you're my friend, and I refuse to let you die! Not if there's a way--any way at all--I can prevent it! Now, is there a chance that it would work? Would it break this damned fever?!"

Spock looked up at him, his face pleading, and then under Kirk's stern eye he shook his head. "I don't know."

"In that case," Kirk drew a deep breath and carefully kept his eyes away from the Vulcan's full lower regions, "we don't have any choice but to try it."

"I...I can't!"

Kirk ignored him. He unfastened his belt and slipped his trousers, and deliberately turned away and offered the Vulcan his back.

There was no resistance Spock could offer. Kirk felt his knee on his hip, felt his hands slip under his armpits, and grip his shoulders with fingers of steel. He closed his eyes and ground his teeth together at the first sharp pain of penetration. Spock pressed himself close. His body was hard and rigid with tension. His breath was so hot that it scorched Kirk's neck. He wrapped his arms about the Captain's chest and hugged him with such intensity Kirk feared his ribs must surely break. Spock's loins were pressing urgently against his buttocks as he forced himself deeper into his body. The sweat broke out of Kirk's skin. It hurt far worse than he had ever imagined anything could and the Vulcan's organ was still swelling inside him in spasmodic, almost rhythmic pulsations. Its proportions were phenomenal. The pressure inside Kirk increased until he was certain it would burst out of him. He repressed the urge to vomit.

And then Spock began to thrust. Kirk gasped at the pain--it was as if red hot knives dissected his bowel--and then clamped his jaws shut. There was no way to stop it now, even if that was what he desired. Spock's hot mouth was against his neck, sucking, drawing at the nonexistent glands that would have provided Kirk with his share of pleasure had he also been Vulcan--and female.

The semi-animal instincts of the primitive had taken over and Spock responded to their demands energetically and with a singular lack of repression. He had forgotten that Kirk was not Vulcan, had forgotten even that he was another man and not the woman his body demanded.

The thrusting increased in speed and vigor as the urgency mounted. Spock's breathing became harsher, hissing in Kirk's ear. His fingers gripped harder, slipping on sweating skin. His powerful body drove itself finally against Kirk's and the Captain felt him tremble, heard him groan, and then came the distinct and unmistakable throb of ejaculation.

Kirk dared breathe again. There was a red curtain of blood in front of his eyes and a hot fullness in his bowel that demanded immediate expulsion, but Spock was not nearly prepared to let him go. His body was still trembling with ecstasy and he clung to Kirk's back with continuing intensity. Kirk felt him stir again with arousal, his loins moving gently against him. This time, although Kirk braced himself against it, there was no tearing thrust. The Vulcan's expelled semen acted as a lubricant and his hot, hard phallus moved with much greater ease inside Kirk's body. His grip around Kirk's chest loosened and he pinched the Captain's nipples between fingers and thumb. Kirk found himself beginning to relax, and with the slackening of his muscles the last of the pain faded to a memory. The insertion felt merely like a severe case of constipation. Spock pressed himself



James

close to Kirk's rump and his body trembled once more with a mounting climax. He bit hard into Kirk's shoulder.

This time, when Spock's grip relaxed, Kirk simply had to pull away and bolt outside into the darkness to empty both his bowel and his stomach, retching dryly. Gingerly he examined himself and to his surprise found that, despite the outstanding size of the Vulcan's organ, there was no blood--his rectum had not been torn. He submerged himself in the black icy cold waters of the river and tried to wash away the sense of contamination and the sensation of the Vulcan's touch.

His head cleared and the giddy singing faded out of his ears and gradually he began to wonder just what it was that was bugging him.

For centuries past, convention had decreed that for two men to have any sort of sexual relationship was undesirable, unhealthy, unclean; that a normal healthy man should recoil from it in revulsion and horror. And yet now that he had experienced it with someone of whom he was genuinely fond, he was neither revolted with himself, nor horrified. In fact, thinking back on the incident with honesty, he had to admit that the Vulcan's trembling body against his back and the teeth sunk in his neck had not produced an unpleasant reaction within his own body. He touched the tender bitten place on his neck gently and felt a shiver go through him. If it were not for the ripping agony in his bowel--but after the first ejaculation there had not been pain, only a warm overfullness.

He sat on a boulder at the river's edge with his feet dangling in the water while he tried hard to arrange and analyze his feelings. Even after such intimate contact, he felt no dislike of the Vulcan, no squeamishness about going near him again as he had feared he would, but he felt sure there would be embarrassment between them. Too much embarrassment for a man of Spock's sensitivity to bear. He would find it necessary to remove himself from Kirk and the memories of what had occurred, and take himself off to the furthest reaches of the galaxy in a vain attempt to forget. Kirk suddenly found that he couldn't stand the thought of being without the Vulcan. He needed him. Wanted him. He realized it with a start. There was a hard knot of longing in his own belly.

He realized that he had been away from the cave for a long time. The pink moons were in the sky for the second time. He went back up the shale slope, fed more fuel to the almost dead embers of the fire and went into the cave.

Spock was awake but refused to look at him. Kirk sat down beside him and sighed. "Is the fever broken?" he asked.

In the rising light of the fire Spock nodded. "Yes," he breathed. "It is over and I will live."

"Don't sound so bitter about it."

"I have used you, hurt you, and degraded you. It would have been better for me to die."

Kirk noticed the Vulcan's cheeks glistened, as if they might be wet with tears. For a moment he was silent.

"I don't think so. Not better for me, anyway," he said at last, slowly. "I've realized something tonight that I didn't know before, Mr. Spock. You see, I love you as well."

Spock looked at him, the flames dancing in his eyes, and he read the truth in his Captain's face. He reached out to Kirk and put his arms around him, drawing him close, and this time the kiss on his neck was as gentle as that of a woman. Kirk found his own hands on the Vulcan's back, returning the gentle pressure. Their genitals touched and mutual thrill of desire coursed upwards through them both, joining, uniting. They clung together in an ecstasy of love. Spock twisted his leg around Kirk's and, knowing full well what he did, Kirk caressed his friend's neck and gently pinched the swollen sensitive glands between his fingertips.

Spock responded at once, his body arching and thrusting against Kirk's. Kirk sought the Vulcan's mouth with his own and they pressed together, thighs and bellies and chests, as with open lips and probing tongues each explored the interior of the other's mouth.

They soared into ecstasy together, their climax throbbing and their fingernails digging deep into one another's shoulders. Their breath rasped in the silence. Then, when it was over, they slept in each other's arms, Spock's soft head of hair against Kirk's shoulder and his hand tucked warmly away in his most intimate part. As he drifted into slumber, Kirk didn't mind a bit.

In the morning, after they had slept, Kirk lay on his back while Spock made slow gentle love to him and brought him eventually to a mellow, satisfying climax. Spock clung to him and kissed him adoringly as he savored every tremor that shook him. And then they went down to the river and carefully washed each other's bodies.

As the reincarnated orb of the sun lifted itself above the horizon, they sat side by side outside the cave entrance and shared the meat of the animals Kirk had killed. Despite the fact that it was flesh, Spock ate with relish while between mouthfuls Kirk told him of his encounter with the apemen. The Vulcan sucked his fingers clean and frowned, looking towards the spot where the chasm vented the river and the shale slopes led down to the plain.

"In these circumstances it would be inadvisable for us to become separated from our phasers," he said thoughtfully.

Kirk looked at him in surprise. "You don't think those creatures could constitute any danger to us here?"

"It's never wise to underestimate the primitive mind. Curiosity is as much a spur to advancement as is necessity. From here our position is easily defensible, but in the open we would be vulnerable to all forms of attack from the cliff tops."

Kirk gazed round at the continuous rocky rim. "I see what you mean. It wouldn't take a great deal of intelligence to throw rocks at us. We'll keep the phasers close to hand."

Having eaten, the two men went to explore the waterfall and basin pools at its foot. Seen at close quarters, it was a spectacular phenomenon. A sheer silver curtain of water that fell with a continuous and unabating roar. Its spray hung about it like a garment of fine mist and sparkled with rainbow colors in the sunlight. The fierce undercurrents had cut down and back into the rock and not only was the pool bottomlessly deep, but behind the waterfall itself was a wet, green cave.

There were fish in the pool and Spock, with more efficiency and enthusiasm than he had displayed the previous day, quickly fashioned more spears and they dived for them. It became a sport, seeing who could dive deepest and stay down longest. Kirk soon found himself proved stronger. Spock's strength had been greatly wasted by the rigors of the pon farr and it became obvious that he would take time to recover.

The fish were a curious species with blunt armored heads and serrated jaws, but beneath the leathery skin the flesh was white and looked as if it would be tender when cooked. Their supper and breakfast for the next day thus assured, they moved out of reach of the spray and lay down on the grass to dry, two bodies gradually turning brown in the sun.

Kirk squinted into the brassy sky and sighed a deep sigh. "What happens to us now?" he asked.

"Hm?" Spock rolled his head and looked at him sleepily. "Happens?"

"Your fever's broken--properly this time. Do you lose interest now, in sexual matters, until the next pon farr?"

Spock turned on his side and gazed at him, mildly amused. "Do you want me to?" he inquired with mock solemnity.

Kirk cursed silently. Of all times to develop a sense of humor,

Spock had to choose the moment when he wanted a few straight answers. "I want to know what normally happens."

"Why?"

"Because I'm involved, too, damn it!"

Spock grinned. "It is a classic example of the Ring of Soshern."

"Huh?"

"It is a condition of being first theorized by an early Vulcan philosopher of that name. He propounded that if wanting leads to having, the having inevitably produces more want. It is a continuous process and only within the circle lies contentment. It is a supremely logical theorem."

Kirk had a remote feeling that he'd been complimented, but he wasn't sure how, or why, and it didn't answer his question. "So it doesn't all end here?"

"It can if you wish it to." A frown clouded Spock's face. "The circle can be broken. Wanting can be suppressed and the yearning to have, denied."

"But only within the circle lies contentment," Kirk repeated.

"If you wish...."

"You know what I wish," Kirk said, and moved closer.

Spock put an arm around him and muttered something comforting in Vulcan, and soon he was sound asleep. Kirk lay thinking for some time, trying to translate the term, but the answer he came up with made no sense when applied to himself. Still scowling a little, he too dozed in the sun.

That afternoon there were clouds in the sky for the first time, hurrying eastwards on a wind too high to be felt at ground level. The atmosphere became oppressive and the sun, as it sank, sullen. The two men eyed the changing face of nature with apprehension.

Towards evening the clouds became lower and it was cooler although the oppressiveness remained. Dressed now in boots and trousers and the tattered remains of their shirts, they made preparations for a prolonged spell of bad weather. Kirk collected anything and everything that looked as though it might burn and saw to the cooking of the fish while Spock went off somewhere with tricorder and phaser and eventually returned with arms filled with two kinds of fruit. From a niche in the chasm wall he brought large elongated pears and from a bush nearer the waterfall some blue berries which later proved to be sour and inedible.

They sat in the cave entrance and feasted sparingly on fish and fruit and

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pitched the useless berries away down the slope until it was dark. The sunset that night was gray and unspectacular and darkness fell quickly. Soon afterwards it began to drizzle with rain and they were forced to retreat into the cave to keep dry. The rain put out their fire, and in attempting to light another Kirk almost choked them both with wood-smoke.

And so they sat in the dark and listened to the rain until they became chilled, and then they lay down in each other's arms. Soon they were warm again and too involved in the intimacy of their new-found relationship to notice the increasing fury of the storm.

A long time afterward Kirk woke up. Outside the cave the rain was lashing wildly against the rock walls of the chasm and the sky gave out a sound like the continual rolling and clashing of steel balls. From time to time the interior of the cave lit luridly as the lightning flashed. Disturbed in his sleep by Kirk's movements, Spock rolled over and nuzzled into him and soon both were sleeping soundly once more.

The morning was bright and fresh and they were awake early. Everything had been washed clean by the rain and the oppressiveness had gone from the air, although heavy clouds still lurked on the horizon and promised more storms to come. The volume of water coming over the falls had doubled, and the river flowed twice as swiftly. It was now too dangerous to swim and so they contented themselves with washing in the shallows and then returned to the cave to eat.

Kirk tested his communicator but the only reply was a crackle and a hiss of static--signs that the ion storm was still raging full force beyond the planet's atmospheric envelope. He exchanged raised eyebrows with Spock and put the device away again. Both had mixed feelings about the continuing absence of the ENTERPRISE. They enjoyed their solitude together, but they were becoming increasingly concerned for the starship and the safety of her crew. They reached simultaneously for the last piece of fish. Spock won it and Kirk chased after him. Laughing, they raced down the slopes, ending up rolling together in the meadow grass beside the pools. The fish was quickly forgotten and remained uneaten.

Spock stood on top of a rock with his hands on his hips and his back to the waterfall and gazed towards the plain. There was a look of anxiety on his face. Flat on his back in the grass, Kirk looked lazily up at him.

"What is it?"

"I thought," Spock said slowly, "that I saw something move."

Kirk got up and stood beside him, craning his neck, "I don't see anything."

Spock shook his head, but the frown remained.

"The phasers!" Kirk realized abruptly that they had both broken their resolution of the previous day and their weapons had been left behind them at the cave. "Keep watch here. I'll go and fetch them," he said. Fully awake now, he raced up the shale slopes.

The phasers were exactly where he had left them, on a flat-topped rock just inside the cave entrance. He snatched them up, seized the tricorder as a breathless afterthought and bolted outside.

Kirk froze in his tracks. Beneath him, at the foot of the shale slope, were a large number of the apelike man-creatures. There were easily a dozen of them, all males, in two roughly equal groups either side of the river. They were literally sniffing their way upstream, noses to the ground.

Kirk withdrew into the concealing shadows of the cave and watched them pass, his eyes bright with alarm. Each creature carried a bundle of spears under its arm and a crude throwing stick in one hand. They walked in a stooping posture, bending forward frequently and leaning on their knuckles to sniff the ground. It was impossible at the distance to read any expression into their faces, even if the faces themselves were capable of displaying any. The ridges above the eyes lent a permanent scowl and the protruding jaws a pout. The creature's attitudes were both nervous and determined.

Kirk reasoned that they were searching for him--that they had been mystified by his appearance beside the river, their curiosity aroused and perhaps also feelings of revenge, if they were capable of such, for he had been directly connected with the deaths of their companions. In any event, in view of his previous experience, he had no reason to believe them anything but hostile.

Kirk remembered that he held both phasers in his hand. Spock was unarmed and still waiting for him beside the waterfall. He had no choice but to wait until the creatures had passed by, and then he slipped anxiously out of the cave and away through the shortening morning shadows. He knew that it would take him longer to reach the linked pools than it would the apemen who, although intent upon their trail, had the more direct route.

The cliffs were growing warm in the sun and Kirk kept his back to them, feeling the heat of the rock through his shirt. He hurried as well as he was able while maintaining sufficient caution to avoid discovery from below. His heart rose into his throat as he approached the vantage point from which he could overlook the waterfall and the pools. Looking

down he could see the apemen gathered in a rough semicircle about the dead saurian and paying it all their attention. They were intrigued with its size and the way in which it had been killed and showed no fear of it at all, poking it with their spears and shouting to each other in loud voices. Of Spock there was no sign at all.

Kirk began to climb down into the basin, dodging from one rock to another and keeping a careful eye on the apemen. He was no more than half-way down when they suddenly lost interest in the carcass and moved towards the waterfall. There was determination and aggressive assurance in their advance and Kirk quickly realized that they had either seen Spock, or smelt him out with their keen noses.

Apparently, Spock realized it too. He broke from the shelter of the rocks and raced towards the water, his course diagonal to that of the apemen. With a collective shout they converged on him, fitting their spears to their throwing sticks as they ran. Spock reached the waters edge barely ahead of them and dived, vanishing beneath a spreading pattern of ripples. The apemen sent several spears plunging into the water after him and then stood on the bank with spears and throwing sticks ready for immediate use.

It was more than Kirk could tolerate. He was not prepared to see the Vulcan speared like a fish as he surfaced for air. He stood and took careful aim, and fired into their midst. He was rewarded with the satisfaction of seeing his chosen target flare green and vanish. The remainder milled in agitated confusion and then turned to face the source of the attack. Kirk fired twice more as they started their rush at him. One creature vanished while another toppled over and began to thresh wildly. Its bellows disconcerted the others more than the bloodless slaughter. They dispersed, their bravado dissolving into terror. Only one, the largest and apparently the leader, showed any inclination to carry home the attack. Snarling and running on feet and folded hands, it charged at Kirk in a direct frontal assault. Kirk saw the square yellow teeth, the bloodshot whites of its eyes, even the lice in its coat before he shot it. Looking around for the others, he saw them retreating rapidly towards the plain, totally demoralized at their leader's demise.

Kirk ran to the edge of the pool and looked around anxiously.

"Spock! Spock!" There was no movement and no answering shout. He looked into the water with growing alarm. Even when fully fit Spock couldn't stay down this long! Was it possible that an unlucky spear thrust had caught him as he dived? Kirk's eyes searched the

edges of the reed beds where the current slackened. There was no drifting, face-down body. Where, then...? Had Spock overestimated his own endurance and drowned somewhere below in those unplumbed depths, his body unrecoverable on the bottom? Kirk looked at the pounding waterfall and at the cliff tops and at the bright golden sky. He found it hard--impossible--to believe that Spock could be dead, and yet what other explanation could there be? The growing panic of despair made thinking all but impossible. Where beneath all that water could the Vulcan have hidden? How could he have stayed alive?!

Beneath the water! In a flash Kirk remembered the green cave. He raced to the falling, fraying edge of the water and squeezed behind it. Sure enough, Spock was there, still in the water and clinging feebly to the edge of the rock as the current tried to tug him away. As Kirk pulled him out he was barely conscious, his body bruised and bleeding from the cruel buffeting of rocks and water. Kirk heaved him onto the wet rock and rubbed his hands and arms vigorously.

Spock coughed convulsively and brought up so much water Kirk imagined he had swallowed at least half the river. Then, in a typical Vulcan reaction to injury, he ejected his breakfast and lay still, gasping. Kirk consoled himself that at least his breathing was stronger than when he had first pulled him out.

Spock came to his senses gradually. He remembered diving into the water quite clearly, swimming down and down until the increasing pressure made his ears pop. He remembered the strength of the current snatching at him, swirling him round and smashing him again and again against the rocks as if determined to break his bones and crush the life out of him. His thought processes became slow and stupid, the blood sang in his ears and his lungs strained until he had had to breathe water. He did not remember the frantic fight to regain the surface, the struggle to escape the waterfall which threatened to carry him down once more to his doom, or Kirk's eventual helping hand.

He opened his eyes. He lay on his back some distance from the falls and Kirk was on his knees beside him looking anxiously into his face. Spock frowned at him, trying to make some sense of what had happened and wondering why his body felt so heavy. He failed to realize how close he had come to drowning.

"Jim?" His voice was a weak whisper.

"It's all right. Take it easy for a while and you'll be all right."

"The creatures...!" Spock struggled to sit up and collapsed in another fit of violent coughing.



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Kirk soothed him. "They're gone. For the time being, anyway."

Coughing convulsively, Spock shook his head. "We can no longer remain here," he gasped. "They will return--and in greater numbers!"

"And our phasers won't hold out forever," Kirk added ruefully. "I don't think we could meet them on their own terms. As soon as you're able we'll leave here. Maybe we can lose them in the hills."

Spock shook his head. "I doubt they'd come after us. It is this place that they want."

Kirk understood. "A comfortable, safe location, and all that's been keeping them out were those flying reptiles. Now they want us out of the way as well, even if they have to kill us."

"In their world, kill or be killed is the first and often the only rule of survival." Spock made another concerted attempt to get his legs under him, this time with success although he retched and choked with renewed violence. Kirk put a concerned arm around him as he vomited another great gush of river water.

"I don't think we'll be going anywhere for a while," he said, almost to himself. "You've swallowed almost enough of that river to kill you." Aloud he said, "If you feel up to it we'll get you to the cave. You can rest properly there. Another hour'll turn this basin into a sun trap. We'll fry."

Spock wrapped a protective bracing arm around his ribs. "I have felt better," he admitted. "But I am able to travel a short distance, provided the pace is slow."

Kirk grinned encouragingly and helped him onto his feet.

The pace, as it turned out, was very slow. Spock limped on a bruised and badly cut leg that refused to support him and so Kirk had to carry most of his weight. Kirk began to realize just how much vitality the exertions of the past days had drained out of him. Their meals had scarcely been sufficient to support the energy output survival that this environment demanded. He was both hungry and tired, and the further they progressed the further away the homely comfort of the cave seemed to become. The distance elongated as their weariness increased. Both men needed to rest frequently and they paused often against the rocks, panting. By the time they reached the foot of the final ascent, the sun had reached the zenith of its arc and blazed down without mercy out of a brass-bright sky.

Kirk wiped the sweat from his face onto the sleeve of his shirt and took Spock's arm across his shoulder before assaulting the final slope. They arrived at the cave entrance and staggered inside.

Kirk lay at Spock's side and waited for the flashing lights to clear out of his head. He felt sick and weak and much too tired ever to move again. Beside him the Vulcan continued to cough water out of his lungs, and by now there was an ominous rattle in his chest. Kirk hated to listen to it.

He got to his knees and spent a long time examining Spock's leg. There was a deep puncture wound inflicted by the rocks and extensive bruising, but no signs of the fracture he had been dreading. Kirk fretted over the injuries. He knew only too well that the wound in his own arm showed no signs of healing. Its edges were still fresh and raw and it wept blood at the slightest provocation. He knew that the greatest danger of all, both to himself and to Spock, was that of infections. It was not a comforting thought that they had no antibiotics--not even a clean bandage to share between them.

He bandaged Spock's leg with rags torn from his shirt and moved on to inspect the Vulcan's ribs, probing gently. Spock winced and coughed again. Kirk looked anxiously into his face. "Will you be all right?" he asked, in need of assurance himself.

Spock met his eyes with a calmness, almost a serenity overlying his pain, and nodded.

"I have to go and get us some food," Kirk told him, reluctant to leave but acknowledging the necessity.

"Be careful, Jim."

Kirk looked at him kindly and nodded. "I will be."

Outside the cave the air boiled off the rocks in a shimmering distance-distorting curtain. The sun was directly overhead, a dazzling blue-white ball that left after-images on the retina of the eye. Preferring not to think about the heat or the sweat that ran freely down his back, Kirk gathered their fishing spears and set off towards the linked pools.

The only available food was fish. They knew of no animal life within the chasm, and to eat the man-ape that now lay dead in the meadow grass smacked too strongly of cannibalism for Kirk's stomach. There was a limit to what even a hungry man would eat.

The fish swam deep to avoid the heat of the sun. Kirk had to dive after them and his hunger quickly began to tell on him once more. He took three fish, gutted them beside the water, and then

took the opportunity to bathe and
rebandage his arm.

With the fish slung over his shoulder by their tails, he started back to the cave by a longer, higher route that would give an excellent view of the rift and its approaches. Nothing moved on the sunlit shadowless plain. The scree was vividly white and reflected the sun's brilliance into his eyes. He noticed that clouds still lingered on the horizon.

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Growing out of a crevice in the cliff he found several bushes leaning out over the high path. Their leaves were withered and their roots washed out of the soil by the rain, but each bore generous bunches of fruit. To Kirk, the hard shells looked identical to those they had discovered and eaten on the first night of their sojourn. Being hungry to the point of weakness, he cracked two or three on the spot and ate them. They moistened his mouth and filled the void in his stomach.

It was much cooler in the cave. The rock provided good insulation against the heat. Kirk assured himself that Spock was as comfortable as their meager resources could make him, although his skin was now dry and unusually hot to the touch. They exchanged reassuring words and gentle touches and then Kirk went outside again to gather kindling for a fire.

By the time the fish were cooking over the flames Kirk began to experience the first twinges of discomfort just about the place where his belt buckled. He massaged the area and did his best to ignore it. Once again the air was becoming heavy and oppressive, and when the sun began to decline the clouds he had noticed earlier drifted up from the south, pregnant and threatening.

Despite the gnawing ache that persisted in his belly, Kirk went again to the river, stripped off the remains of his shirt and soaked the rags in water. Carrying them back to the cave, he used them to bathe Spock's burning body. The Vulcan was uncomplaining although the cough still wracked him and the breath wheezed in his chest. He was intensely thirsty but they had nothing in which to carry water and he was unable to reach the river.

Kirk sat down beside him and wrapped his arms around his belly, rocking backwards and forwards in an attempt to dislodge the increasing pain. Spock looked at him in concern.

"Jim?"

Kirk managed to make a wan grin look convincing. "It's all right. Just something I ate. No! Don't worry about it," he insisted as Spock tried to reach him. "It'll pass."

Outside the shrouded sun sank below
the horizon line and the world became a

darkening, all-devouring gray. It did not rain and the oppressiveness continued. The air itself seemed thick and unbreathe-able as if the sun had burned all the oxygen out of it and left only the useless gas. An utterly black inert night stole over the land.

The starship officers lay side by side in the darkness of the cave, hands and thighs touching in mutual sympathy. After a long time it seemed to Kirk that Spock slept, though he seemed and from time to time a fit of coughing shook him. The heat of fever scorched out of his skin and seemed to raise the temperature even more. As for Kirk, there was no question of sleep. The pain in his stomach had increased to crippling proportions and was spreading to every part of his body. A caustic ocean of acid consumed him from within.

The night wore on and high above the cloud layers the pink moons danced into the sky. As the hours passed Kirk's agony increased. He lay on the floor of the cave folded double, his rigid fingers driven deep into his gut. His teeth were gritted, his lips drawn back in a fixed snarl and his eyes glazed, staring. Icy rivulets of sweat ran from his body as he tried to keep silent, but that was not possible. The sighs, the grunts and the sharp gasps filled the cave as liquid fire ran through his veins.

The clouds hung broodingly from the sky with dark distended bellies. Kirk watched the occasional flicker of electricity and prayed that it would rain--that it would do something, anything--that would break the accursed silence and make the air breatheable.

It was almost morning when it did eventually rain. It rained in torrential, never-ending sheets of water that rattled against the cliffs and created new rivulets that added to and swelled the river. The thunder was continuous and the lightning flashed again and again across the sky.

Kirk's pain had moved, working slowly downwards from his stomach to the lowest part of his intestine, and it had changed in nature also. Now it was a regular cramping sensation that involved every muscle in his chest and abdomen. With every spasm the breath whistled through his teeth.

At last he felt the overpowering urge to drag himself from the cave and empty his bowel. The excretion was green and ran from him like water. The rain quickly washed it away. Nature demanded his attention several times in rapid succession and then the crampings gradually died away. He was left totally drained. He sat on a rock and sank his face in his hands. The rain ran down his back and eased sensation and awareness back into his tortured body. But by bit he began to feel human again. He had been lucky. Very, very lucky and he knew it.

One did not normally consume incompatible alien fruits and survive.

The blackness of night gave way to the darkest possible shade of gray and the rain continued to fall. Kirk limped back to the cave on shaking legs that threatened to fold under him at any moment. He sat down and rested his forehead on his knees, wishing desperately that the sweating and the trembling would stop. The residual pain was something he could cope with, but a body that disobeyed him was an insurmountable problem.

He became aware of a hand on his arm, the fingers applying gentle pressure. He looked up into Spock's eyes.

"It's all right. Just a stomach upset," Kirk said, answering the unasked question.

Spock saw through the lie. Reaching up, his fingertips brushed the Captain's cheek. Kirk felt the momentary confusion of being a dual entity as their minds merged.

"Jim," Spock murmured reproachfully, "you shouldn't keep things from me. You're part of me now," and again he used the nonsensical Vulcan term that had so puzzled Kirk before.

Spock's hand moved over Kirk's face and Kirk felt the Vulcan mind soothe him, and he relaxed, feeling the last of the pain flow out of his fingertips. He lay down and Spock snuggled up to him, wrapping him in his arms and maintaining the therapeutic mental union. They lay awake for some time, listening to the rain and watching the gray light grow steadily brighter.

Kirk woke with a start and realized that he'd been dozing for hours. Beside him Spock was coughing again and seemed to be choking on a throat full of phlegm. Kirk went to his assistance, applying the age-old adage of banging him on the back. Spock put his head down, retched and spat out a mass of congealed blood. At once his air passages cleared and he could breathe again, although his face remained a deathly white.

Not for the first time Kirk wished that he had more than a scanty outline knowledge of medical matters. He had suspected broken ribs, but a punctured lung was altogether a more serious affair, if that was indeed what Spock was suffering from. There were recorded instances, the endemic range of diseases, for example, where a Vulcan would bleed freely into the stomach and the higher intestinal regions in an attempt to rid himself of the infection. This bleeding could be a similar physical reaction to the continued presence of water in the lungs, or it could merely indicate a small rupture due to the constant coughing. Without a medical scanner, there was no way to tell which and Spock didn't seem to know himself.

Outside the cave the rain had at last stopped and the sun was beginning to break through the lightening clouds. Everything was wet and pools of water were still trapped in rocky basins. Kirk was able to take Spock a desperately needed drink of water in his cupped hands. Below, the river thundered past at a breathtaking rate and completely covered the waterside rocks they knelt on to wash.

Kirk looked at the sun and judged it to be almost afternoon--time to eat. He squared his shoulders and went into the cave, prepared for a fight.

Spock gave him one. He looked sullenly from Kirk to the offered fish and shook his head. "Thank you, Captain, but I really am not hungry," he insisted for the second time.

Kirk shoved the fish under his nose and glared at him. "It might be against your principles, mister, and it might be monotonous," he snarled, "but it's food, and right now that's just what you need. I'm not asking you, I'm telling you! Now eat it! Before I ram it down your goddamned Vulcan throat!"

Spock looked into his angry bearded face and sighed unhappily. He began to pick at the fish.

"And eat it all," Kirk added sternly. Taking his own share he went back outside to watch the rift and the approaches to the plain.

The heat of the sun was increasing steadily, burning up the cloud and steaming the rocks dry. The sky cleared to its normal brassy-gold color and the glare made him squint. He chewed on the fish laboriously, fully understanding Spock's reluctance to eat it. Familiarity made it tasteless--like a man continually fed on bread and water, he had lost the incentive to eat. But eat it he did, with a grim determination based on the sure knowledge of necessity.

With eyes narrowed against the glare of rocks and water he looked again toward the plain, and gradually the motion of his jaws slowed to a halt. Crawling across the white scree slope was a line of purposefully moving black dots. There was no doubt as to what they were--the ape-men were returning.

Kirk hurried into the cave where Spock had guiltily put the uneaten fish aside. The Captain snatched up his phaser, checked the load and shook it, scowling. It was one of the smaller fist-sized units and its energy levels were seriously depleted.

Spock raised an eyebrow at him. "They're coming?" he asked.

Kirk nodded tersely. "They're coming."

Spock got himself onto his feet. Later, thinking back on it, Kirk wasn't

sure just how he accomplished that, but at the time it didn't seem to matter. Without a word, he handed Spock his phaser and they went outside.

This time the apemen seemed to know exactly where they were. They approached cautiously and gathered in a large group at the bottom of the shale slope, just at the fringe of phaser range. Kirk cradled his phaser against his cheek and watched them, trying hard not to see the Vulcan struggling with himself in the corner of his eye. Spock was having more difficulty with his breathing and had one arm wrapped tightly about the lower part of his chest, at exactly the place Kirk suspected a broken rib. An occasional suppressed cough shook his gaunt frame.

The apemen spent a long time conversing in their guttural grunts before a decision was reached. The heat of the sun beat down in waves and in their concealment behind the rocks the two men sweltered. And then two of the creatures began to advance. Kirk saw Spock level his phaser.

He held up his hand. "No! Wait a minute."

Spock looked at him curiously. There was an intense frown of concentration on Kirk's face as he studied the approaching beasts. For beasts they still were, for all that they walked upright like men.

Looking at them again he realized that there was indeed something odd about their attitude. Despite the abundance of crude weapons among the group on the river bank, these two were unarmed and displayed no open signs of aggression. Their hands were empty except for a single, large unidentifiable object one of them carried at its side, and they walked as near upright as the curvature of their spines and the forward thrust of their skulls would allow. The previous day they had attacked furiously on all fours.

Still, some ten yards below the cave they stopped and became agitated, baring their square yellow teeth after the manner of fearful terrestrial apes. Their colleagues screeched encouragement from below, but they approached the cave no closer.

Kirk decided it was time he played his hunch. He gestured to Spock to remain where he was, out of sight behind the rocks, and very carefully he stood up. An awed silence fell on the gathering below and the two creatures on the slope drew back a little, the whites of their eyes showing fearfully. Slowly Kirk raised his hand until he held the phaser leveled at chest height. His finger trembled on the button. The creatures cowered in abject terror. The eyes of primitive and modern man met. Kirk's frown deepened still more and he lowered his weapon.

One of the apemen crept forward under his gaze, its belly pressed against the rock and the bulky something in its hand. The apemen were, apparently, accomplished hunters. Kirk saw that it was a cooked haunch of meat, still with a tuft of white fur adhering to the bone. The creature set it on a rock still some distance away and then the two of them withdrew to the bottom of the slope. Kirk exchanged a cautionary glance with Spock, advanced slowly to the rock and picked up the meat, all the while keeping the phaser ready for instant use.

The act of acceptance caused a great stir of excitement among the apemen. They chattered and danced and gave every sign of great rejoicing, and in seemingly high spirits they withdrew toward the rift. Feeling as if he were waking from a most unworldly dream, Kirk watched them go. Abruptly his situation had changed from that of a hunted fugitive to--what? A god? Bewildered, he carried the meat back to the cave.

"I don't understand what I just did," he said haltingly.

"It would seem that they now regard you as a supernatural being, Captain," Spock said, easing his position against the rock. "They bring you offerings. They hold you in the most high esteem, and most important of all, they no longer challenge your right to inhabit this place. On the most basic level, you have undoubtedly saved our lives."

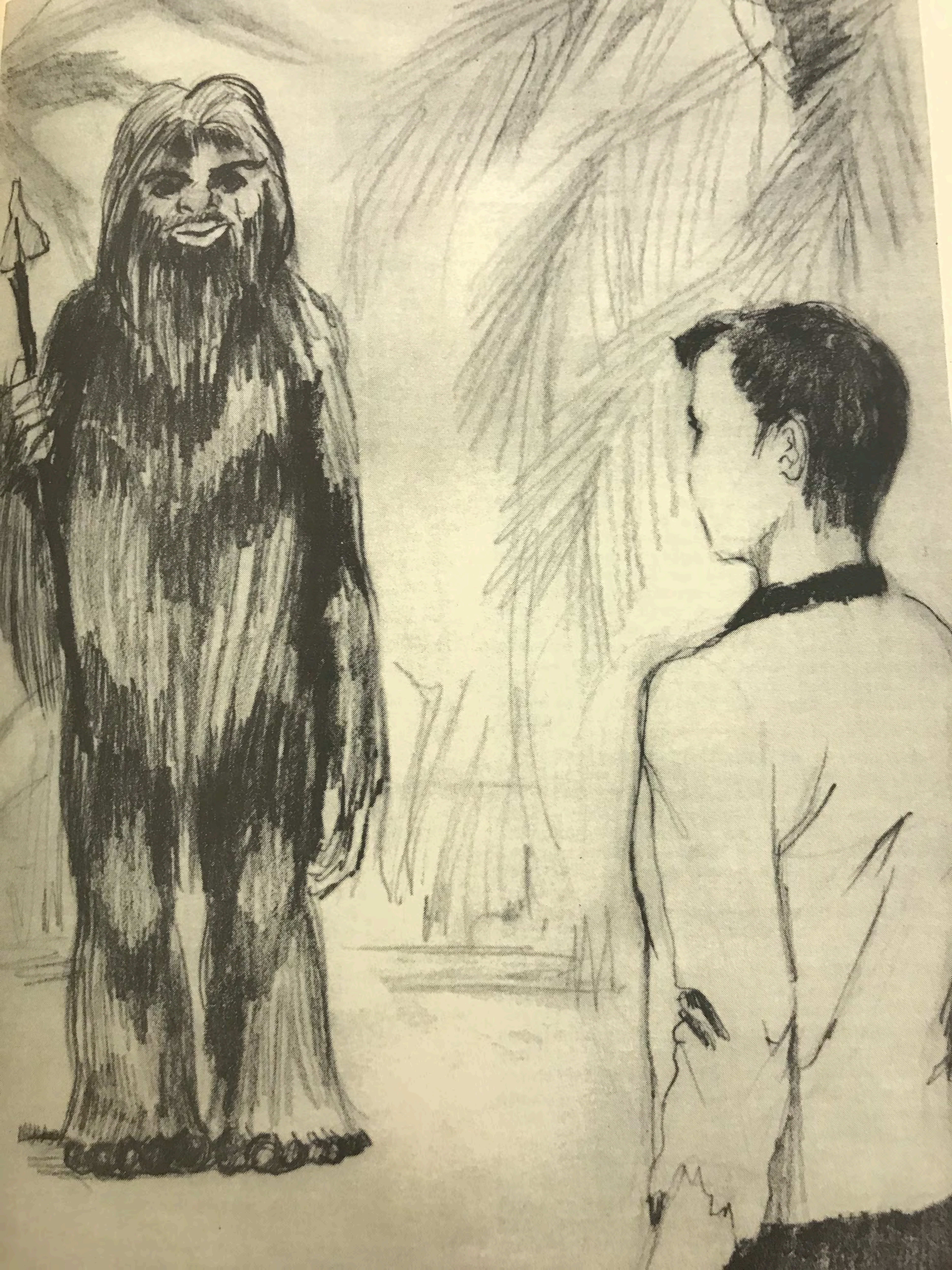
Kirk squatted down and hefted the phaser. "A god? The God of the Mountain, with lightning at my fingertips. It must seem that way to them." He looked across at Spock. "And you?"

"The demon that lives below the water," Spock said with a glint of wry amusement.

"So that's the way it all starts. All that fervor of religion." Kirk scowled and shook his head, and then his eyes brightened as they fell upon the meat. "Well, this'll prove a pleasant change from fish, even if we did get it under false pretenses."

The meat was moist and tasted faintly of minted lamb. Kirk enjoyed his meal thoroughly and felt the new strength it gave him almost at once. Spock, however, refused to partake. Toward evening his fever returned and the cough worsened. Kirk helped him into the cave and nightfall found him on his knees trying once more to bathe the dry burning heat out of the Vulcan's skin.

There was very little he could do to help. The rasping of Spock's breath became harsher and after a while the feverish tossing ceased. Kirk found himself wondering why Spock didn't make use of his peculiar self-healing powers, but the Vulcan seemed disinclined--in fact, he seemed scarcely aware of what was happening to him.



An examination revealed a weeping ulcer developing at the edge of the leg wound. As likely as not it was a manifestation of the infection Kirk dreaded. He cleaned the wound as best he could with the last remnants of his shirt and left it open to the air in the hope that it would close and begin to heal. With Spock all but unconscious, he felt as helpless and incompetent as a child. He sat in the cave entrance and watched the twin moons dance once, twice across the sky. Behind him in the cave Spock's breathing continued noisy and ragged, broken occasionally by a thick cough. He lay quite still but Kirk knew that he suffered and the knowledge grieved him. He nursed his own increasingly sore arm and studied the constellations, and he thought about the ENTERPRISE.

A starship could be many things to many men: a white dove of peace, a swiftly winged messenger, a space-born fortress bringing anger and vengeance to her enemies. To Kirk she was a woman, one that spoke his language and understood his whims. She was a strange lover, and here on this planet he had taken another, equally bizarre. If Spock lived, so he reflected, they would make a most curious triangle.

Kirk slept lightly, to be awakened from a succession of fantastic two-dimensional dreams by a strangled half-shout from inside the cave. He found Spock on his knees choking and totally unable to breathe. His face was darkening alarmingly and his clawed fingers were buried deep in his diaphragm as if trying to dig out some terrible pain. Kirk dropped to his knees beside him, frantic.

"Spock! Spock, for Gods sake, man, breathe! Never mind how much it hurts! You've got to breathe!"

To give him credit Spock tried, but it seemed as if his lungs were locked fast against him. With a whole planet full of air to breathe he was suffocating. His eyes were glazed over and in his neck the distended veins stood out like knotted black cords beneath his skin. He was losing his grip on life itself. In desperation Kirk shook him with all his might. It did no good and neither did the sharp blow he administered between the shoulder blades. Spock began to topple forward. Kirk's hand, descending for a second time missed its intended target and caught him a glancing blow somewhere around the small of the back.

It was an exceptionally lucky accident. Kirk actually felt something move deep in the Vulcan's body as a large and very solid obstruction shifted. Spock vomited, and from somewhere unreachably far down in his complex lung system he ejected several pints of thick foul-smelling fluid. It was undoubtedly river water that had remained in his chest, draining into the lowest levels to lie stagnant and slowly kill him. Mixed in with it were several blackened clots of

blood, and a short time afterwards, Spock brought up a mouthful of bright fresh blood--but at least he was breathing again and his cough, though still persistent, was no longer thick and phlegmy.

As well as he could, Kirk cleaned up the mess and then sat at Spock's side, soothing the fever out of his skin and murmuring soft, tender words of encouragement. After a while Spock dropped into a light trance and it was then that Kirk knew he would live.

With an intense feeling of relief he went outside to stretch his legs and breathe the warming air deep into his lungs. Whatever else occurred, he knew it would be a good day. He ate a little of the remaining meat, drank and washed at the river and generally tidied up around the camp site. He never once went out of earshot of the cave, knowing that Spock would need his assistance to return to the waking world. The sun crept slowly closer to its highest point.

It was just at noon that he spotted the distant approach of the apemen.

Quickly he returned to the cave, made a passing check on Spock, and collected a phaser. Waiting for the creatures to draw near, he thought about the way it must have been in the ancient Vulcan world when the great armored armies marched against each other until the red soil was stained as green as any earthly meadow. The wounded must have slept then much as Spock slept now, trying desperately to heal themselves before the enemy overran them and slaughtered them where they lay. And if they succeeded, they would have returned again to the battle to receive even more terrible wounds. Truly it had been an age of madness--a madness very similar to that which had burned so intensely in Spock's own eyes a few days before.

The apemen gathered in a group at the bottom of the slope. This time they had come in an even larger number and there were females among them, some with infants clinging to naked, pendulous breasts. Kirk began to feel like a showman putting on a daily display for the natives, but he was more than willing to do just that if it kept these savage warriors off their necks and their spears out of their bellies. As before, two males approached the cave with an offering of cooked meat, and upon Kirk's "miraculous" appearance from behind the rocks they laid it on the rock and retreated to the foot of the slope. He wondered briefly if it was worth the energy expenditure to further impress them with the phaser, but decided against it. They seemed happy enough merely that he accepted the meat, and after a few minutes they moved off again toward the rift. Kirk sighed with relief, grateful that Spock hadn't chosen exactly that moment to need reviving.

The meat was some large internal organ stuffed with something resembling

bamboo shoots. Kirk hoped fervently that the apemen never discovered him to be mortal flesh and blood, just as they were. The results, he was sure, would prove most unfortunate.

"Jim!" Spock's call from the cave was urgent.

Kirk's wild dash to his side contained a marked lack of dignity that ill befitted a god of any standing. Spock was wet with sweat and trying desperately to break trance; his teeth were buried deep in his lip, drawing blood. Kirk obligingly delivered two cracking slaps across the face. Spock snatched his wrist out of the air and held it in a grip of iron.

"Thank you. I am awake," he announced, opening his eyes.

Kirk looked at the smudge of blood on the back of his hand and grinned jubilantly. "I'm glad to see it. For a while there I wondered..." He let the subject drop. "How do you feel?"

"Hungry."

"Then you're in luck. Our primitive friends have taken on the role of provider. Lunch was ceremoniously served a few minutes ago."

He fetched the meat and watched Spock consume the vegetable stuffing with amazing speed. It was the first meal he had actually enjoyed since beaming down from the ENTERPRISE. He finished every last scrap, paused long enough to favor Kirk with one of his rare flashing smiles, and then curled contentedly around his full stomach and dropped into a deep, strength-restoring sleep. Kirk wondered why he didn't develop chronic indigestion, shrugged the problem off as rhetorical, and made his own meal from the bulk of the meat.

He noticed unhappily that despite the trance the wound in Spock's leg was still open and showed no signs at all of healing. There was something unique to the planet that affected their bodies' ability to heal injuries and rebuild damaged tissue.

That evening it became much cooler. When it was dark, Kirk lit a small fire in the cave entrance and snuggled up close to the Vulcan for warmth. Sleepily, Spock put an arm around him and both men slumbered.

Kirk woke to find a lumpy excitement in his belly. He was locked tightly in Spock's arms and the Vulcan was nuzzling into his neck. For several minutes Kirk lay still, half asleep and enjoying the pleasure the Vulcan's attentions produced. Then he felt Spock undoing his belt, and the memory of pain leapt fresh into his mind. His body tensed in every muscle.

"Jim?" Spock murmured close to his ear, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

But Spock's fingers were already caressing his temple. "I told you before, it's no use deceiving me," Spock said softly. "I know every thought in your mind. You're afraid that I'll hurt you again. Don't be. We will learn together and there will be no more pain. I promise you that."

Kirk felt the Vulcan's fingers spread out across his face, seeking and finding the neural channels that led directly into his brain. Despite the tension in his mind, every muscle he possessed relaxed under Spock's soothing self-assured control. He felt the hard bulk of the Vulcan's phallus against his rump, and his muscles jerked tight once more. Spock's forefinger retraced the line of the nerve to his temple and the tautness ebbed away. Kirk felt his anal muscles open wide to admit the thickened rod of flesh. His breath caught in his throat but there was no tearing agony, no pain at all. Spock sighed and nibbled contentedly at his ear.

Entrance was easy. Spock sank himself deep into Kirk's body without any strain at all. He moved to and fro gently and after a few moments Kirk began to move with him, pressing back as Spock pressed forward, and obviously extracting pleasure from the intense sensations they produced. Spock allowed his hand to slip from his face and concentrated on fondling the Captain's rising erection. Kirk didn't notice the cessation of mental anaesthesia. His own excitement paralleled Spock's and the trembling in his body was rapidly approaching a crescendo. Spock gripped him hard and allowed the rhythmic throbbing in Kirk's body to carry him into his own climax.

They relaxed into a descending spiral of euphoria. Kirk didn't want it to end. Turning his head, he sought Spock's mouth and the uncontrolled passion of their kiss and Kirk's touch on his neck were more than sufficient to restart the Vulcan's cycle. He buried his teeth in the soft pad of flesh behind Kirk's ear and the Captain felt a fresh if muted thrill of pleasure tingle all the way down to his toes. Spock had not withdrawn and now Kirk pushed back against him, taking the initiative in a way Spock found unusually pleasureable and stimulating. A throb of blood enlarged his phallus to its fullest extent. Kirk moaned softly, reveling in his ripe overfullness and the Vulcan's domination. It was a carousel of increasing desire and pleasure and satisfaction, and it continued almost without pause until the first light of dawn crept into the sky.

Morning found them sleeping lightly, still wrapped in each other's arms and cupped together like spoons. Tentatively, Kirk wriggled out of the Vulcan's arms and made haste to the privacy of a nearby boulder. The Vulcan's semen acted very like an enema; he reflected that for as long as their relationship lasted he would not have to worry about that

ever present problem of starship life, constipation.

He had finished, just, when Spock came looking for him. They met beside the river and washed, and then walked naked, side by side, to the meadows beside the waterfall. Spock still limped badly on his torn leg, and he preferred not to trust his battered body to the water again. He sat on the grass nursing his ribs while Kirk dived for fish.

Kirk sat down beside him to dry and for a few minutes they talked of incidental matters. Then Kirk found Spock's arm around him once more, pulling him down onto the grass. Instead of his hitherto direct physical approach, Spock teased him without mercy, kissing his shoulders and neck and pressing the hot, hard tip of his phallus against his anal opening, sometimes inserting it a short way, probing, and then withdrawing for long periods until Kirk was on his knees begging for release. Spock laughed at him and rolled with him in the grass, controlling Kirk's mind and body at will, as easily as he controlled his own. It was exactly the same sort of semi-violent love play most Vulcan couples engage in, and though he didn't realize it at the time, Kirk learned a great deal from it. He absorbed the one important lesson Spock had started to teach him with the mind meld--to relax every part of his body and to accept the insertion of an enlarged male organ without fear of pain. He learned also where to touch the Vulcan in order to produce the most intense pleasure, and how the sensitivity passed from the glands of the neck to the much larger pectoral gland just forward of the spine in the small of the back. His touch there made Spock writhe, his teeth clenched in Kirk's neck. It was a most valuable education. The delicate art of controlling the balance of Spock's hormones by touch and caress would come later, but for now it was enough that Kirk had discovered how to handle his playful partner.

With the pressure of Kirk's hand against his back, Spock clung to him and soared into his climax. Kirk went with him, feeling the distended gland throb in rhythm with the Vulcan's ejaculation. They clung together while their heartbeats steadied, their thighs smeared with milky semen.

Spock shuddered, a little startled at the way command had been taken from him. Kirk tapped him admonishingly on the tip of his nose, kissed him on the neck and went to the pool to wash. Spock came up behind him and cheerfully pushed him in.

Carrying Kirk's fish between them, they went back to the cave and dressed. Kirk squinted towards the rift, but as yet there was no sign of the apemen. Looking at the sun he judged that there was still an hour before they were due to appear with their ritual offering.

Spock caught his eye and nodded invitingly towards the cave.

"No!" Kirk held up his hands in mock horror. "Let a guy keep his pants on for an hour, will you? I know you're making up for lost time, but there is a limit!"

Totally unoffended, Spock joined him on a rock and they inspected each other's wounds. Neither showed any signs of healing, but the ulcer in Spock's leg, though still open, was no deeper and looked clean. The tide of infection seemed to have been stemmed.

Spock was retying the bandage around Kirk's arm when a sharp sound from the cave shattered their new and exhilarating world into a thousand pieces. Kirk and Spock exchanged long glances and without a word Kirk went inside and picked up a communicator.

"Kirk here," he said, opening the lid.

"Captain Kirk?! Are you all right Sir?!" Scott's voice demanded. "We've been worried out o' our heads...!"

"We're--all right, Mr. Scott," Kirk said, looking over the communicator at Spock who had come to stand in the entrance, a Vulcan mask effectively concealing his feelings. "We're both all right," Kirk added.

"Both?!" It was McCoy's voice interjecting. "But Jim! That's not...!"

"We'll talk it over later, Bones," Kirk told him in a tone that brooked no argument. "Mr. Scott, we'll be ready to come aboard almost immediately. I want a full status report waiting for me when I arrive."

"Aye, Sir. We're in pretty bad shape, but we're patchin' her up. We'll be achieving orbital status in three minutes. I'll beam you aboard when we're secure."

"Very good, Mr. Scott. Have a medical team standing by. We could do with a little patching up ourselves."

And so it was ended with stunning abruptness. Kirk lowered the communicator and he and Spock gazed at each other, meaning passing between them without the need for words. The Vulcan's eyes were dark and troubled. He knew that Kirk was already making the complex readjustment back to starship Captain.

"We don't have to take this with us," Kirk said haltingly. "We can leave everything that's happened right here on this planet and never mention it again, if that's what you want."

Spock stared at the communicator, a slight frown between his eyes the only trace of expression on his face. The seconds ticked past all too quickly. He said nothing, but finally he shook his

head. It was neither assent nor denial, but merely a gesture of bewilderment.

The communicator in Kirk's hand bleeped. "Scott here, Captain. Ready to beam you and the First Officer aboard, Sir."

Kirk gathered up the tricorder and the phasers. "Very well, Mr. Scott," he said wearily. "Energize."

* * * * *

Kirk yelped at the sudden sting of antiseptic.

"For heaven's sake, hush up!" McCoy snarled. "I've got sick people next door and compared with what some of them have got this is a scratch."

"I don't understand what you're so mad about," Kirk grumbled, trying to see what McCoy was doing without success. Whatever it was it hurt.

The Doctor loaded a hypo with antibiotic and shot the contents into Kirk's arm with scarcely controlled ferocity. "I want to know just what in all Hell's been going on down on that planet!" he said heatedly. "Jim, have you any idea as to what it was that got us into this mess?" Kirk got the chance to do no more than look surprised. "It was an error," McCoy went on, leaning over the bed so that his face was very close to Kirk's. "An obvious, bungling, thick-headed error that would make a child of nine ashamed! And do you know who made it? Our pointed-eared, computer-brained Vulcan friend made it, that's who!"

"I thought it might have been a sensor failure," Kirk suggested lamely.

McCoy snorted his disgust. "That was the first thing we thought of. Scotty's crew checked every sensor and computer system aboard. It was Spock that made the mistake. He transposed two figures of the ion intensity readout and fed them into the computer. His error almost cost this ship and the lives of everyone aboard! There's a man in there now that got caught in the blast when the number four impulse engine burned out. I still don't know if I can save his legs! And there are two more with ruptured lungs. They were in the engineering section when the air blew out. And it's all the fault of that damned Vulcan!"

"You can't condemn a man for one mistake."

"I don't condemn him," McCoy dismissed the notion with a wave of his hand. "I wouldn't condemn any man for an illness that he couldn't help. Jim, there's only one thing that could induce Spock to make a simple basic error like that. A serious mental confusion caused by a hormone imbalance in the body."

"You seem to have all the answers worked out already, Doctor."

McCoy's lip curled. "Not quite all. A hormone imbalance severe enough to upset that regimented clockwork brain of his could mean only one thing. The onset of a second pon farr. And by now that Vulcan should be a long time dead!"

"But he's not, and therefore your diagnosis must be wrong."

"My diagnosis isn't wrong." McCoy sprayed plastiskin liberally onto Kirk's arm. "I've studied his psychological profile and his physical records. I've even analyzed a sample of his latest blood donation. The facts add up, and it's the only possible explanation. When he beamed down to that planet he was already in an advanced state of sexual sensitivity. He couldn't have held out more than a couple of days before he went into the blood fever and died."

"Perhaps there was something down there that reversed the hormone imbalance in the same way that our wounds were prevented from healing--there were some strange crystalline formations that emitted some kind of radiation. He was knocked cold for quite a while. We both were."

McCoy heaved a sigh and shrugged. "Well, I guess I'll just have to look into that. When I've analyzed the samples we brought up I might have some answers. But are you sure he didn't start to get sick soon after you beamed down?" he asked, looking curiously at the bruising on Kirk's neck.

"We--had our problems," Kirk admitted, sitting up to inspect McCoy's handiwork, "but nothing of pon farr proportions."

"I'm glad to hear it. Hey! Lie down there. I haven't finished with you yet." McCoy pushed him back on the bed, produced a medical scanner and began a painstaking examination.

Kirk sighed and relaxed and let him get on with it. "How is Spock?" he asked.

"Hm? All things considered, he's a darned sight healthier than he's got any right to be. He'll limp on that leg for a while and he's got a couple of cracked ribs." McCoy patted Kirk's belly. "As for you, Captain, you've lost a little weight that you could well do without. You must try getting marooned more often. I'm going to give you some tablets that'll help that arm heal. You take two every eight hours and it shouldn't give you any trouble."

Kirk swung his legs off the examination table and accepted the little bottle. "Thank you, Doctor McCoy. Can I now please go and get rid of this beard?"

Hands on hips, McCoy leaned back on his heels and grinned a wicked grin. "I thought it kinda suited you."

Kirk chuckled and shook his head and headed for his quarters.

* * * * *

Kirk spent half the night pacing his room. It was a useless, ineffectual operation, but it was better than lying on his back staring at the darkened ceiling.

For a time he debated whether to call McCoy for a sedative and eventually decided against it. Although his arm ached, it was not the primary cause of his insomnia. His mind was in an unaccustomed turmoil.

With the **ENTERPRISE** headed for a major refit and refurbishing at Star Base Nine, there was little to be done to the ship herself. Buckled hull plates and a new impulse drive were matters for the shipbuilder's yard. Kirk looked forward to the long weeks of rest and repair and the inevitable inquiry with foreboding. With Spock's history and McCoy's medical testimony, he had no doubt of the outcome. A simple misinterpretation of data due to a passing physical disability.

The major problems were McCoy-- and Spock himself. The Doctor, despite all his claims, was a man of advanced scientific awareness and not merely a pills and potions practitioner. He'd know soon enough if he was not already aware that no planetary influence had intervened to save the Vulcan's life.

What conclusions would he reach and what would he deduce from them? And what would he do about it?

As for Spock, the approaching idleness would be hardest of all for him to bear. It would give him time to reflect and to brood. On the planet, a different personality had emerged from the man, a personality so long fettered and restricted by his staid Vulcan upbringing. Since their return to the ship he had become indrawn and solitary. They had exchanged no more than a dozen words. Kirk wished that there were some comfort he could offer--he knew well enough that the whole ungainly affair might be enough to destroy the Vulcan's mental stability, and that was a point McCoy would be watching also. The memory of the intense sadness in the Vulcan's eyes rose up like a specter to haunt him.

A soft knock came at the door. Kirk, who had begun to doze at his desk, started awake. The chronometer read one-fifty-nine.

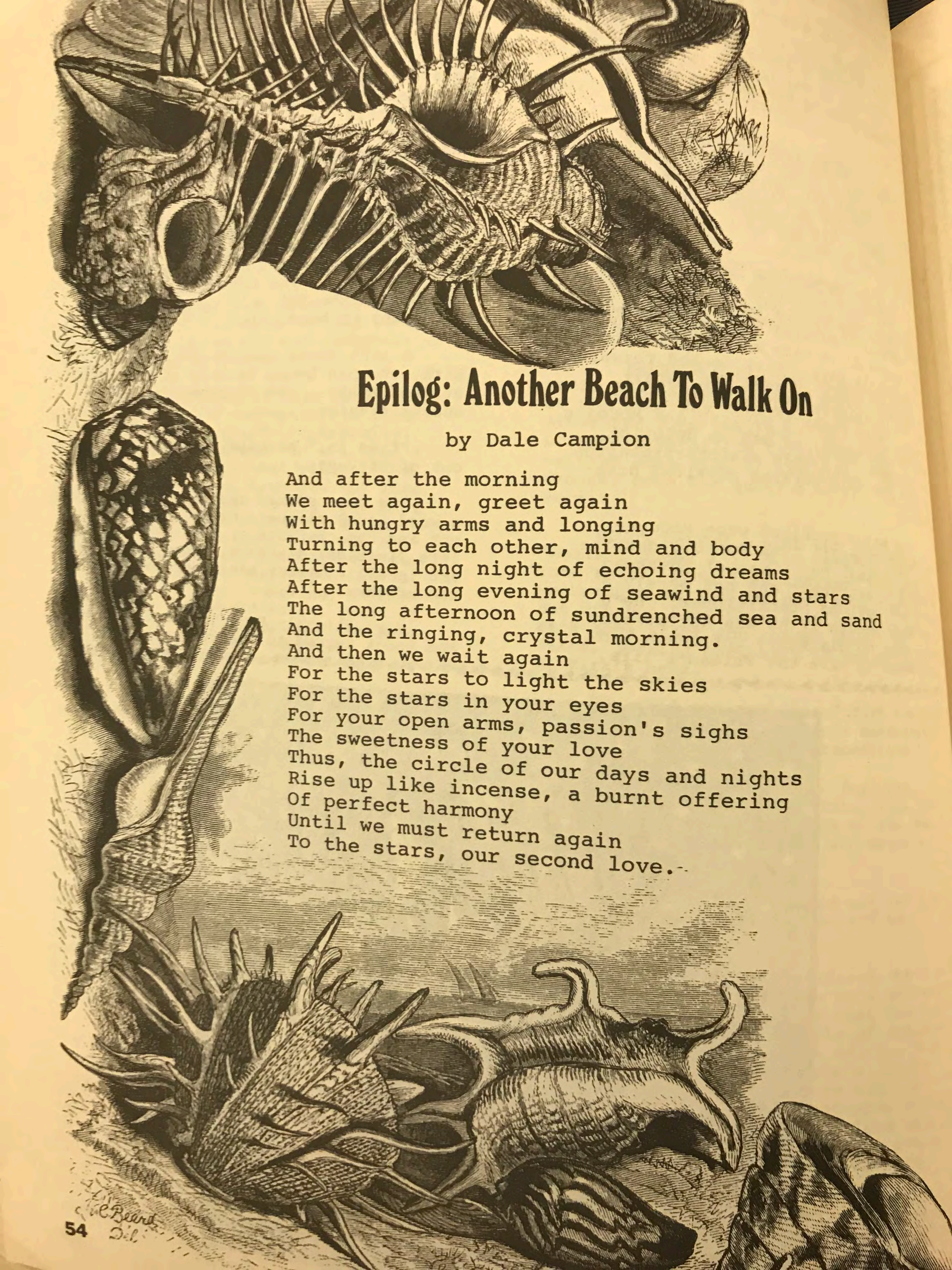
"Come in," he said, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

The door opened soundlessly and without a word Spock slipped inside. Their eyes met and the confines of the room receded into limitless distance. Time expanded and in all eternity there were only the two of them.

Very slightly Kirk inclined his head, and Spock turned to the door and locked it.



NOTTVRNO



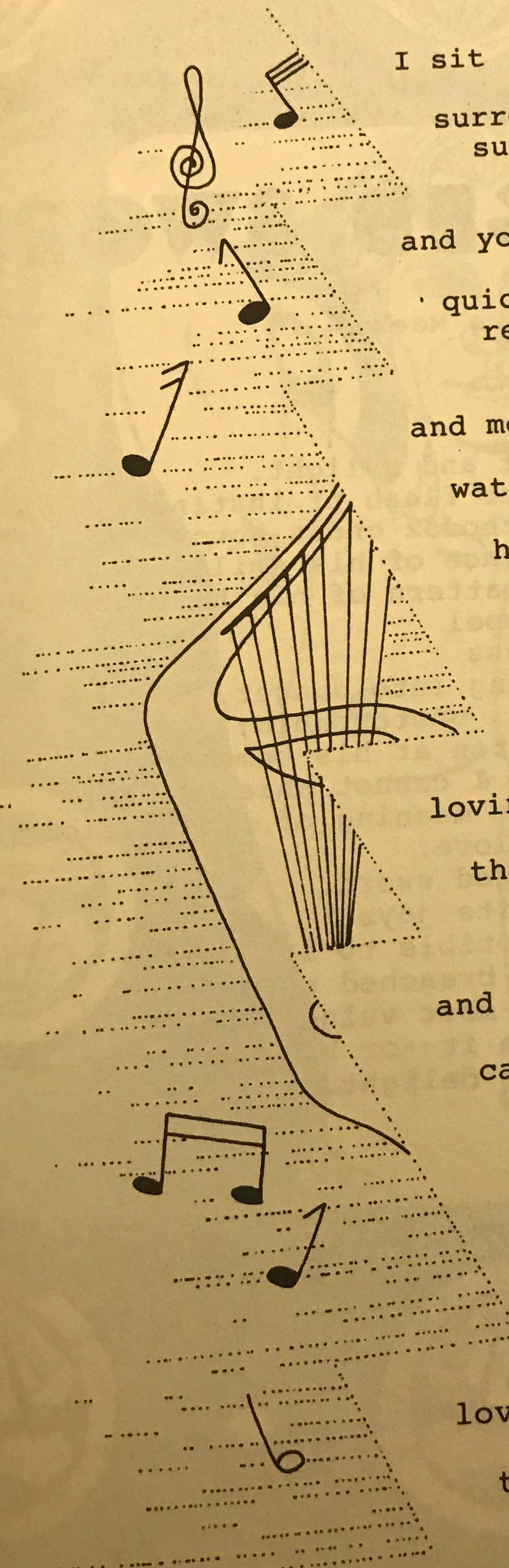
Epilog: Another Beach To Walk On

by Dale Campion

And after the morning
We meet again, greet again
With hungry arms and longing
Turning to each other, mind and body
After the long night of echoing dreams
After the long evening of seawind and stars
The long afternoon of sundrenched sea and sand
And the ringing, crystal morning.
And then we wait again
For the stars to light the skies
For the stars in your eyes
For your open arms, passion's sighs
The sweetness of your love
Thus, the circle of our days and nights
Rise up like incense, a burnt offering
Of perfect harmony
Until we must return again
To the stars, our second love.

The Lyrist

by Jenny Starr



I sit

surrounded by others
surrounded by sound
surrounded by you

and your lyre

quicksilver strummer
rec room Apollo
obeying your muse

and me

watching your fingers

holding

stroking

plucking

caressing

loving

the feel on my mind
the mind on my body
your body in mine

and my dreams

can you play captains?

holding

stroking


plucking

caressing

loving

the feel of your fingers
on body and mind
please won't you play

me?

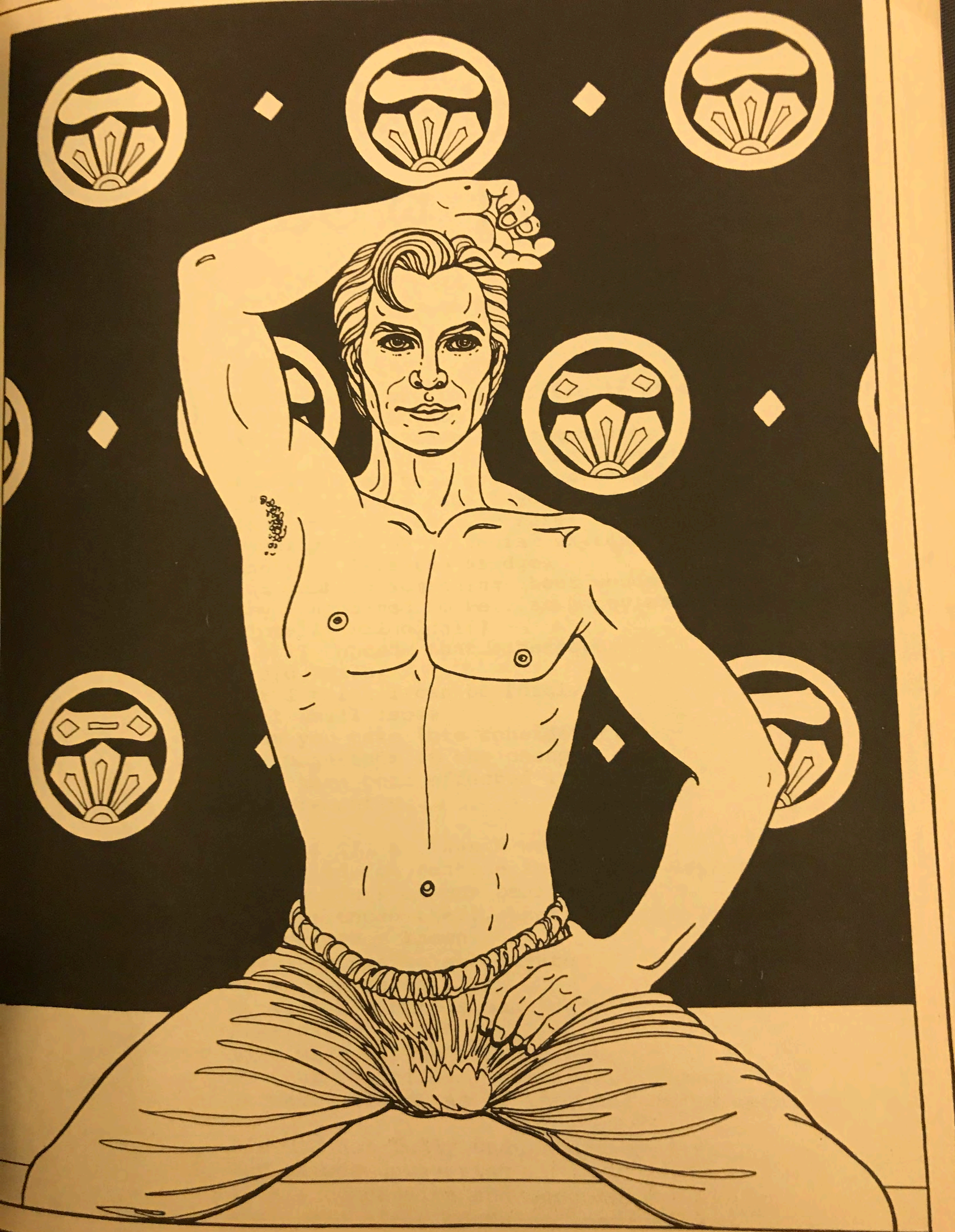


TWO-EDGED SWORD

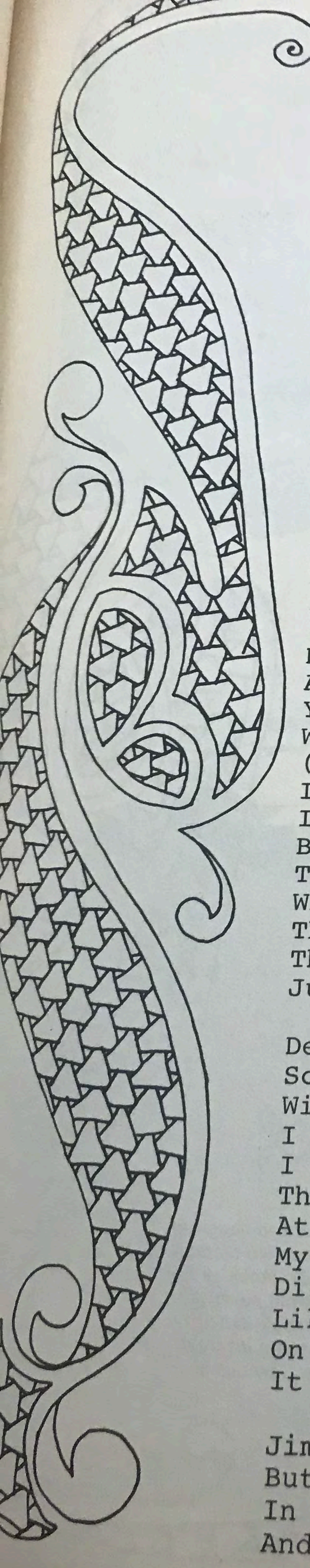
by Sue Meek

His impulsiveness:
A source of torment and delight.
From the quicksilver flash of instinct
Shown in some unorthodox chess move,
To the sudden radiance of his smile,
The ever-changing pattern of his thoughts
Never ceases to compel
Yet the same rashness
Can send him hurtling into danger,
Heedless to caution; unstoppable;
And I must wait, often at his command,
While he goes where I cannot shield him.
He has taught me the meaning of frustration
As well as that of love.
Emotion is a two-edged sword.
To open oneself to its joys
Is also to be susceptible to its pain.
It was he who first breached my defenses
And to him I am the most vulnerable.
Yet I would not have it--or him--any other way.
For I have known the delight.





G. FEYRER '85



Soliloquy To a Friend

by Jo Ann Sides

...Yes, Doctor, it is difficult at times
For me to maintain
An acceptable level of composure,
But I really don't think it's possible
For a Vulcan to...grin from ear-to-ear...?
If I correctly recall your somewhat picturesque
(And exaggerated, I'm sure)
Description of my facial expression.
And as I left the bridge,
You mumbled something about wondering
Why I appeared to be...as happy as a clam...?
(Totally illogical!)
I will concede that...perhaps...
I did smile.
But I think I can be forgiven
That small lapse
When you take into consideration
The magnitude of the changes
That have been effected in my life
Just recently...

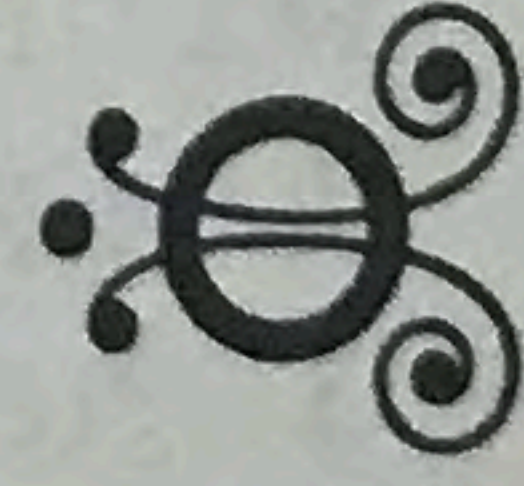
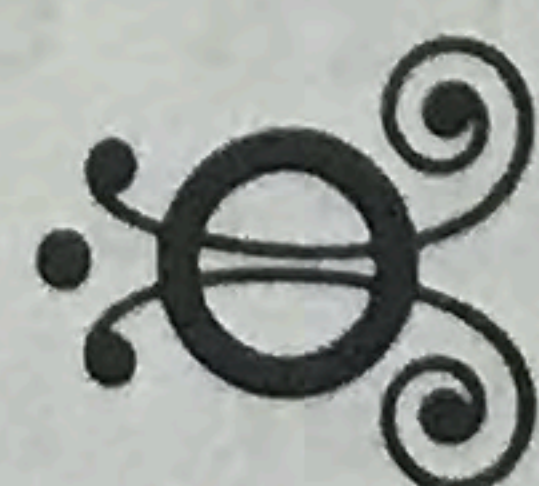
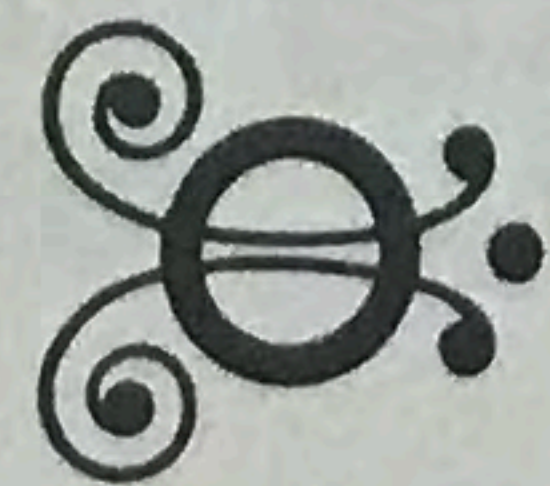
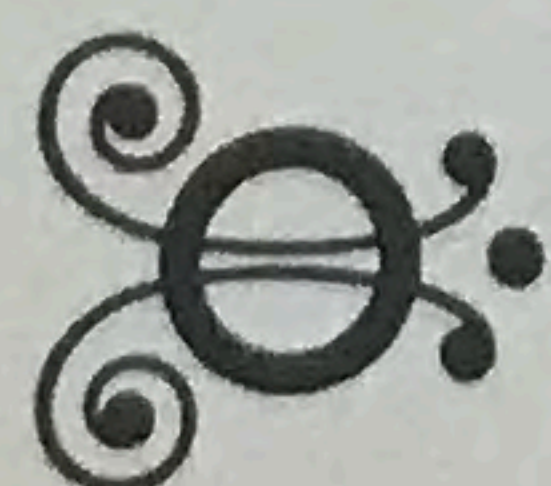
Denerii II, a class M world,
Scheduled for routine survey and exploration.
Within hours of our beaming down
I experienced the...onset...of pon farr.
I have never known
The symptoms to accelerate
At such a rapid pace.
My Vulcan controls and logic
Dissipated
Like mist in the morning sun
On that beautiful...terrible...planet.
It was...almost as if they had never been.

Jim did not fully understand at first,
But he was unwavering
In his compassion and concern
And immediately began to instruct you

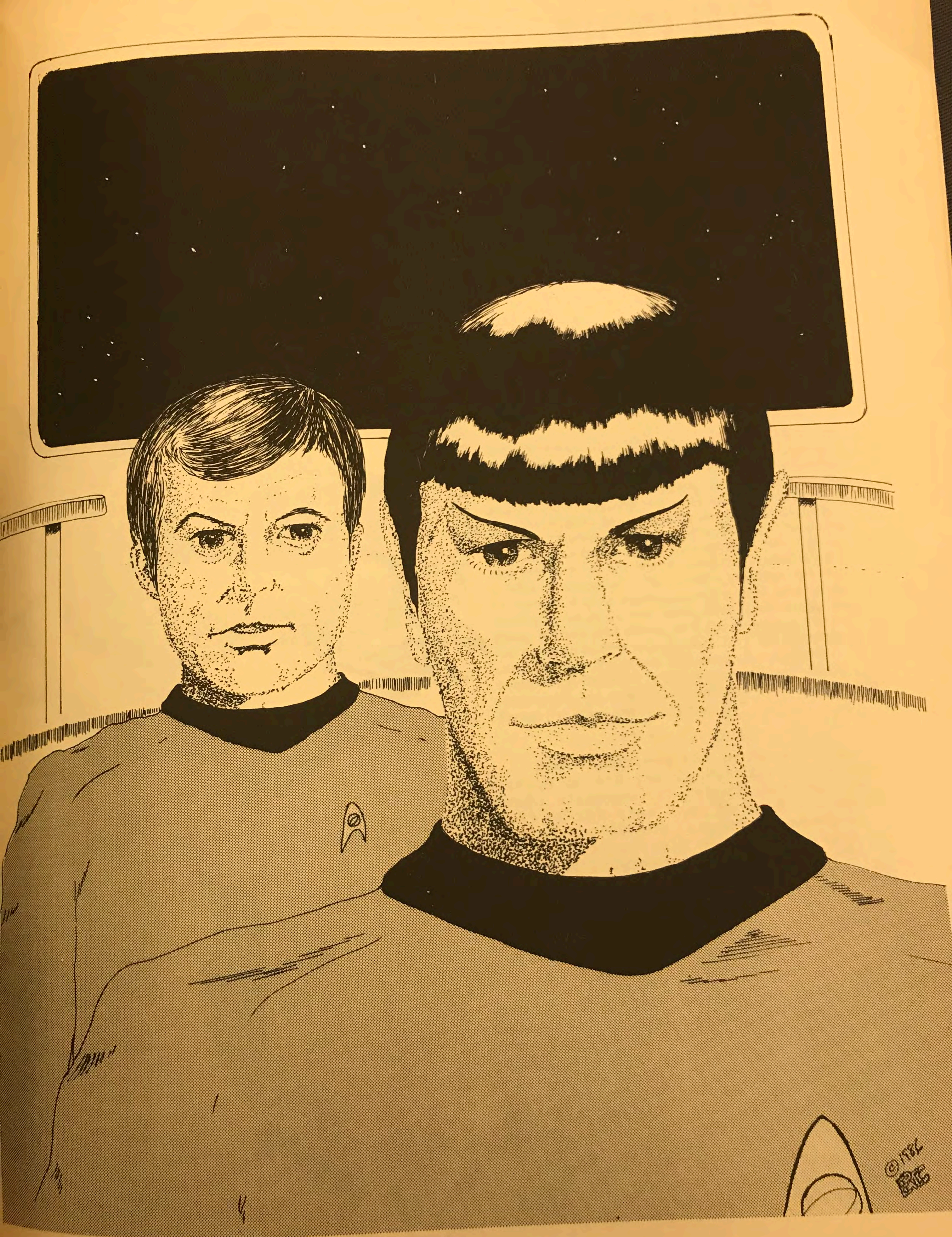
To beam down with your medi-kit.
But I...begged...him not to do so.
And finally had to explain
Assuring him
That there was nothing to be done.
Vulcan was too far away,
And in any case, I was unbonded.
I would simply remain on the planet surface
Until the...situation...resolved itself.

Then...completely disregarding caution,
Jim ordered me to...
Take the necessary...steps...
To ensure my survival.
He insisted
That he could not afford to lose
The best First Officer in the fleet...
Or his friend.
(And then he said he loved me...
And didn't want even to think
Of life without me at his side.)
I of course refused to obey his order
And would not accept his courageous--
And recklessly human--
Offer of assistance.
Only...how could I not accept
With the plak tow raging in my blood...
And everything that I loved
And longed for
Standing at my fingertips,
Demanding acceptance....

So you see, Dr. McCoy...Bones...
I could explain,
And probably will in time.
If Jim doesn't confide in you first.
But for now at least,
You will simply have to contain your...
Curiosity...as best you can.
In any case, you should be quite pleased
That I have finally heeded
The advice you're always giving me to...ah...
Loosen up a little....



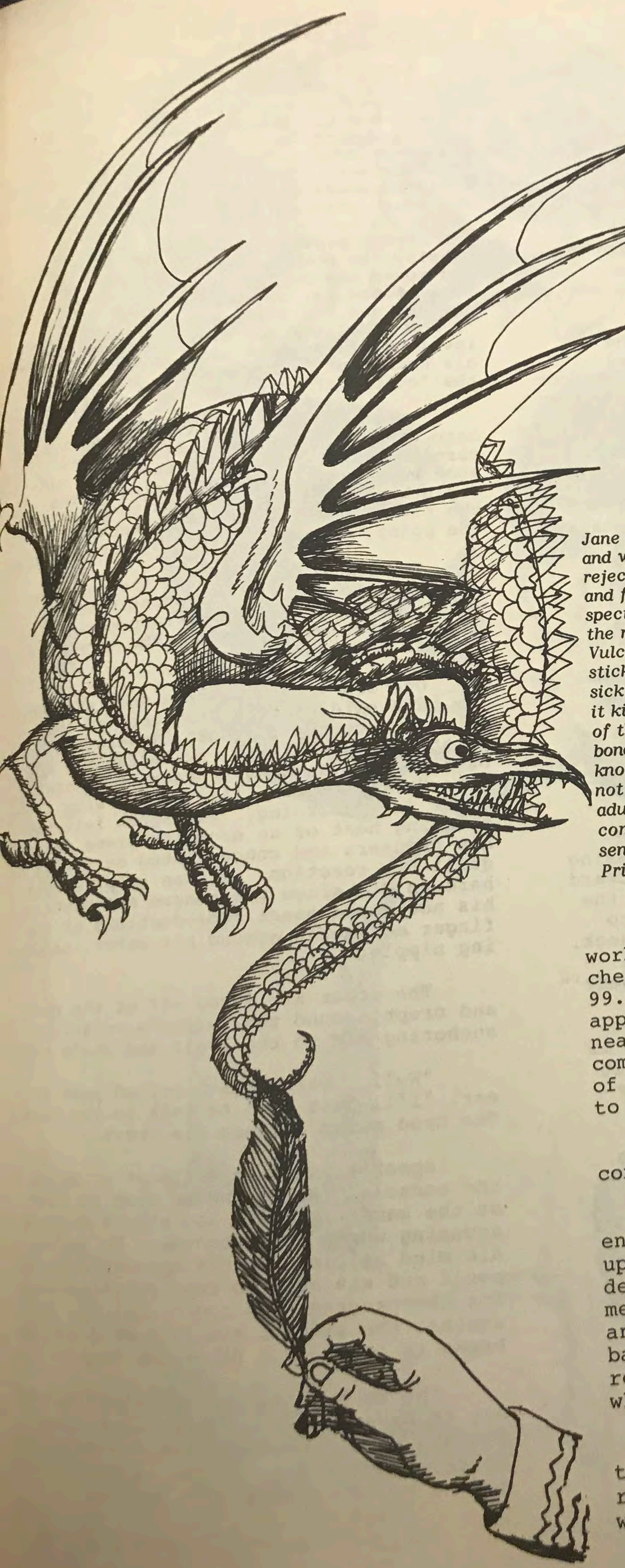
Jo Ann Sides, a widow, lives in the country (in Mississippi) with her teenaged daughter, Merry, a tiny black and white dog of mysterious lineage named Princess, and two Siamese cats named Shadow and Smoke. She is presently attending college where she includes the occasional guitar and English course among more pedantic studies. When time permits, she enjoys writing poetry and filksongs, and hopes to develop further writing skills with the aforementioned English classes. "Soliloquy" was the result of an increasing interest in the deep friendship shared by Spock and McCoy--the friendship that is so obvious in spite of their seemingly constant bickering.



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DC

TICKLING THE DRAGON'S TAIL

by Jane Mailander



Jane Mailander has been reading K/S for five years and writing it for four years. She is currently tacking rejection slips on her wall and mailing out general sf and fantasy stories to professional publications. She specializes in showing the more humorous aspects of the relationship between our favorite Admiral and Vulcan. "Personally," says the overweight brunette, sticking pins in her David Gerrold doll, "I'm a little sick and tired of the 'we're gonna love each other if it kills us' school of K/S. I prefer showing the two of them at a time approximately a year after their bonding--I've never written a 'first time' story. You know, a story that starts with them making the bed, not going to bed--a relationship that has matured, an adult story." She grins. "Course, if the Meese commission finds my really mature stories, I'll be sending you my next submission from Tehachapi State Prison for Wayward Horny Ladies."



Spock examined the program he was working on and ran it through the double-check; although the 'check came up clear 99.9% of the time that he used it, Spock applied the system inspection program nearly as rigorously as did the least competent programmer on the ship. He, of all people, would have been the first to say that Vulcans are not perfect.

The clear signal showed and Spock continued writing his program.

The time was now 2100 hours. The engineering staff meeting would be breaking up soon. Jim had called the meeting to determine the number and type of replacement parts that needed to be ordered now and picked up when they arrived at Starbase 11 in three weeks. Jim would be returning to their stateroom in a short while.

Spock ran a few sample data pieces through the program and collated the results, noting where the subprograms would have to be inserted.

As he started on the first major subprogram, the outer door opened and hissed shut, and Jim's footsteps clicked down the small hall, past Spock's open office door and into the bedroom.

Spock continued working. He listened to Jim getting ready for the night; undressing, relieving himself, showering. When the soft padding of Jim's bare feet came back in his direction, Spock turned to his programming with a vengeance.

It was game time again.

"What are you doing, Spock?" The Captain's voice came from the entrance to the office.

Spock didn't take his eyes off the screen. "At present, Captain, I am preparing a teaching program which will instruct Starfleet cadets in the techniques of courseplotting at warp speeds."

"I see." Spock heard Kirk move into the room. "Are you going to try to get it accepted by Starfleet as a teaching device?"

"It has already been accepted, Captain. I have been commissioned to create this program."

"Is that so? Well, that's great."

Now Spock felt Kirk move up behind him looking at the data on the screen and casually resting a hand on the Vulcan's shoulder. Spock did not look around.

"When do you have to have it done?"

"I would prefer to finish it tonight."

"You didn't answer my question," a most uncaptainly voice purred. The hand on Spock's shoulder began absently caressing the neck and shoulder area, moving up toward the face to stroke his jaw. Spock felt the Human's nearness just as Jim bent down to press a soft kiss into the back of his neck. Cool breath wafted past one pointed ear. "I said, 'When does it have to be finished?'"

Spock's body tingled, but he did not even turn his head from the screen. "It is due in three weeks, when I can transmit it from Starbase 11 to Starfleet via the computer complex."

Now Jim's arms draped around Spock's neck, and Jim's body pressed into his back, held off only by the back of Spock's chair. The honey voice murmured, "That's a long time for you to finish the program. How long will it take you to finish?"

"Approximately three point six four hours."

The arms tightened in a careless embrace. The soft lips brushed against an ear. "Are you sure you want to finish it tonight?"

Spock's lower body tightened; he controlled the flush of heat with some diffi-

culty. "Quite sure, Captain." He continued to write the program.

Now the lips pressed against the side of Spock's neck and the gentle tongue washed over the patch of flesh; Jim's hair brushed against Spock's temple. The arms settled around Spock's neck like soft heavy gold necklaces. The honey soft voice poured into his ear. "Mmm. Isn't there some way I could persuade you to stop working now?" The mouth returned to the neck.

Spock pressed the "review" button to display the most recent work he had put in and moved the cursor to correct the placement of one set of numbers. His thighs shifted and his voice had a slight quaver. "I don't believe so, sir." His eyes closed involuntarily as Jim began nibbling along his neck, but he opened them and pressed the "continue" button on the screen.

"Well," Jim breathed, pressing a kiss into the ear, "let me think," another careless kiss, just under the lobe, "of some way," moist tongue licking up the ear's back, "to persuade you to stop for the night, hmm?" Thoughtful sucking of the point, tongue tip playing with ear tip.

The hands that touched the controls were not steady, but they continued to write in instructions for subprograms. Spock's eyes were glued to the screen. He said nothing.

One arm around Spock's neck shifted, the hand sliding down the front of the blue science tunic. Soft fingers manipulated a soft nipple, twiddling the nub of flesh and sending streaks of lightning into Spock's groin, filling him with a great dark yearning. Now Spock felt the swelling heat of an erection press against his trousers and concentrated on trying to quell his reaction. It was surprisingly hard to do, since the tongue movements on his neck were exact reproductions of the finger movements around his other, hardening nipple.

The other arm moved off of the neck and crept around the Vulcan's waist, anchoring him to the chair and Jim's back.

"Well," warm breath wafted past an ear, "I'll just have to talk to you then." The hand moved against his chest.

Spock's hands were almost gripping the console. He had never been as good at the game since Jim had showed him how arousing words could become. He swept his mind as clean of his catatonia as he could and was able to keep punching keys for the program. He could feel the jaw against the side of his face move as Jim began to speak in a clear low tone.

"We're both in the turbolift on the way to have dinner. We're alone, just you and me. Suddenly there's a grinding noise, and the lift stops. I call Scotty and he tells me that it's jammed."

"Highly unlikely," Spock said, more



calmly than he felt. "The turbolift can be halted, but not jammed." He pushed some more buttons.

"Well, whatever. It's stopped and we can't get it going, and we can't get out until it's fixed. Scotty tells us that it'll take him at least an hour to get us out. We've got plenty of air, so there's nothing for us to worry about. We're gonna miss dinner, though."

"Indeed. Most unfortunate." Spock stared at his console, acutely aware of every movement of Kirk's hand against his body. The sly fingers crept back up to tease the nipples again.

"So we're standing there, doing nothing for a few minutes. Then," and the arm around Spock's waist squeezed once, "I realize that this would be a perfect opportunity for us to get a little more... friendly."

The arms fell away from Spock and Kirk moved back. The abrupt loss of body contact made Spock tremble, feeling exposed and vulnerable. Jim's voice continued, relentless sensual entrapment.

"I move over to you and start feeling up under your shirt, stroking your chest. I press the full length of my body against yours, forcing you into a corner; you're too surprised to resist. I put my arms around your waist and hug you close, rubbing my crotch against yours. I want you so much, I'm big and swollen already. I bring my face up close to yours and beg you to make love to me."

Spock's erection pulsed rapidly, aching for the touch that was now denied him. His fingers tapped buttons at random, and he could barely keep facing the screen.

"You don't want to. You're uncomfortable about the idea--you're not sure how we could do it in the small space we have. So I decide I'm going to show you. I start kissing and petting you, giving your bottom a squeeze every now and then in time to your breathing. You're starting to relax now, and you put your arms around me, but I'm doing most of the work 'cause I'm really horny. Well, I want you to do more, so I take one of your hands and put it on my crotch and start rubbing the bulge against your hand. You start feeling around there by yourself, probing and squeezing a little, and I just let go of everything. Now I'm under your power. You could do anything you wanted to me, order me to do anything with you and I would obey at once."

Spock had ceased to concentrate on his work; he was utilizing all his willpower to stay in the chair and not to reach for his throbbing, trapped penis. He slid his boots off and peeled the socks off with his toes in preparation for his breaking point.

"You tell me to get to my knees before you. I do. As you order, I do it. I unfasten your pants and pull them and your underwear down to your knees. I grip your

thighs and start rubbing my face against your cock and balls, kissing you wherever you tell me. I open my mouth and you slide your testicles inside. Now I am sucking them, rolling each one on my tongue, and--"

Spock was out of the chair and coming after Jim in the next moment.

Jim took a step back but Spock's momentum simply carried him along out of the office and into the bedroom. He bounced once on the bed where he was dropped before he was engulfed in Vulcan arms and legs. Jim was wearing a short robe and Spock was in uniform, but that proved to be a minor barrier to the Vulcan's onslaught of passion. He barely managed a small gasp of excitement before his robe was flung open and Spock closed in.

A Vulcan male, schooled in the art of controlling emotions, can seem to take endless amounts of stimulation with nary a twitch of an eyebrow. This is mainly a front--the front comes with the territory of being a Vulcan. The truth of the matter is that, under the duress of a constant barrage of stimulation of one kind or another, the front is worn thin and eventually breaks in one particular way. When this break occurs (normally rare except for the pon farr), all restraints imposed by a thousand years of clean living are gone. This is truly a Vulcan in a pure, wild state--a dangerous creature if he has been stimulated to expressing anger, an eloquent poet if he has been triggered with, say, imagination, and an inhumanly passionate animal if he has been sexually stimulated past the breaking point. The phenomenon has been described as a case of the Vulcan becoming that particular emotion. It is analogous to nothing in the Human experience, and the business of actually stimulating a Vulcan to this point is a risky undertaking for Humans.

Of course, some Humans are born risk-takers....

Spock lay sprawled face-down on the bed; he was able to take slower breaths now and his heart was slowing to a normal rate, but he still did not have the energy to turn himself over or even to get his face out of the pillow. With every breath, the bed seemed to gently heave up and down, as if it was the deck of an ocean-going vessel, rocking him to sleep. His lips still tingled a little and he could taste some blood from the bites he had gotten.

He could feel the cool touch traveling up and down his calf and guessed that Jim was stroking him with his foot; a sideways glance confirmed his hypothesis. Jim was flat on his back, one arm flung wide and the other draped across his chest, fingers barely brushing the sternum.

His head was tilted back on the covers. He looked as if he had just seen a divine revelation. And, yes, one foot was absently caressing the back of Spock's leg.

Spock found the strength to push his face away from the pillow, and his head fell into the coverlet facing Jim. He took a deep breath.

"You...never tire...of this game...do you?"

A smile tugged at the Human's parted lips. He also inhaled deeply.

"Uh uh."

Spock raised his foot and began to reciprocate the stroking motion along Jim's leg. It was their only point of contact.

"I will...no doubt...be forced to...erase...the last part...of my program."

Jim turned his head to look at Spock; his eyes were sparkling with mischief as well as love.

"Not my fault...Some Vulcan you are..." He tried to change position. "Ooo." He lay back down. "I won't...be able...to sit...for a month."

"I presume...that you will...insist on blaming...me?"

"Yup."

Spock gave up trying to hold an intelligent conversation until they had both had a rest. He settled himself where he was and didn't bother trying to retrieve the pillow. One foot moved along the other's shin and found Jim's foot; for a moment the toes clung to each other.

"Night, Jim."

"Spock."

Quiet and peace filled the room, soothing and warming, lulling Spock to the brink of extinction.

"Spock?"

Spock roused himself one final time.

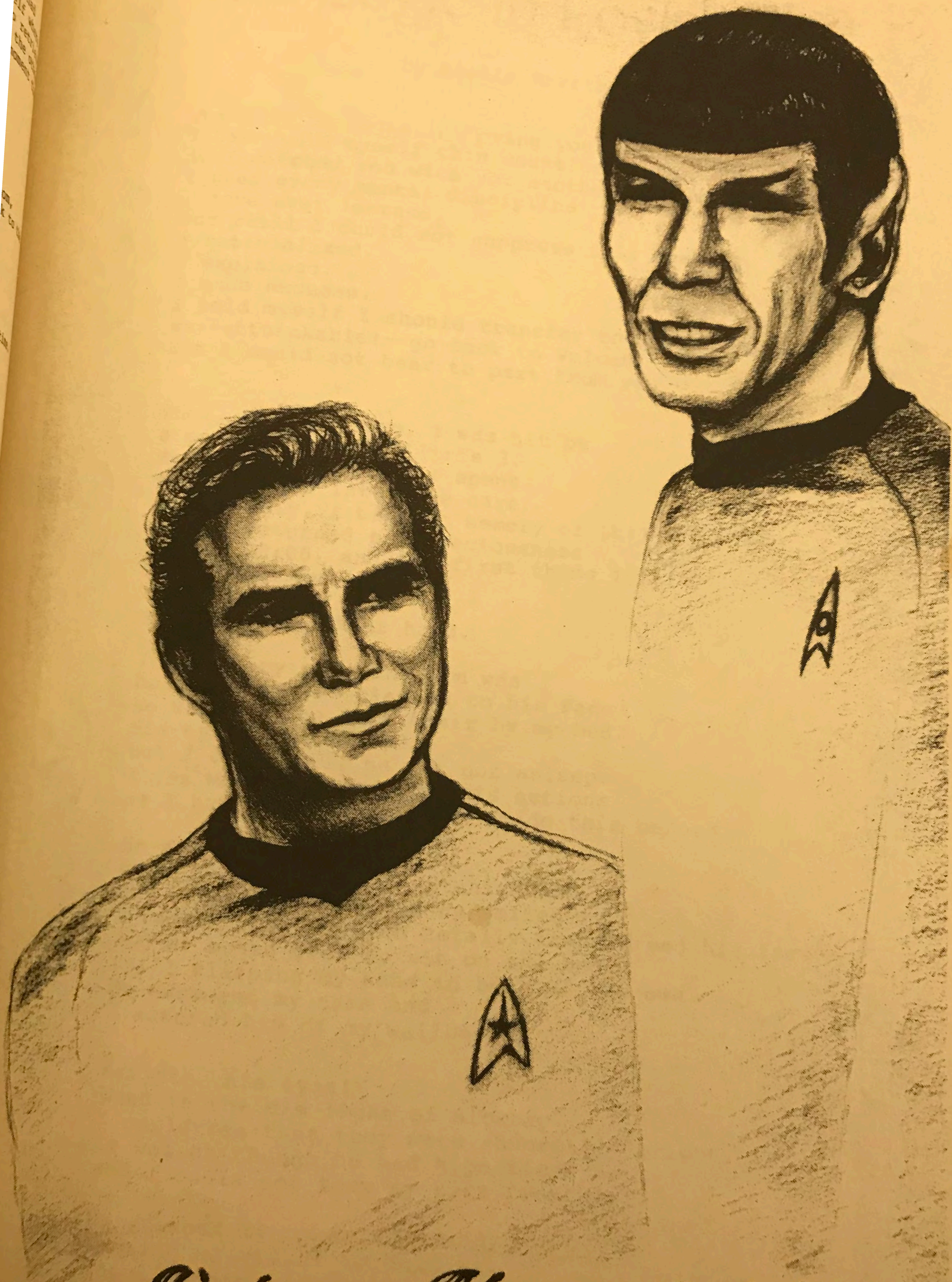
"Mmm?"

"Wanna do this again some time?"

Spock went to sleep.



The first year, together....



Dulcans Never Joke??

The Logic In Loving You

by Noelle Harrison

There is no logic in loving you.
I have told myself this countless times
as I watched you with yet another female.
I used every mental discipline
I have ever learned,
but still I could not suppress this feeling.
I rationalized.
I explained.
I made excuses.
I told myself I should transfer to another ship,
or--unthinkable!--go back to Vulcan.
But I could not bear to part from you.

Then, two days ago, I was hit by
a poison dart on Alliris 3.
McCoy later told me I spent
ten hours in intensive care.
(Thankfully, I have no memory of it!)
When I returned to consciousness
it was 03:00, and the first thing I felt
was a warm hand--
no, two hands!--
clutching my right hand.

I opened my eyes and Jim was
holding my hand clasped to his face.
He was sitting in a chair by my bed.
His eyes were closed,
but I could tell he was not asleep.
I was most surprised by his actions
as I have never known him to do this before.

He suddenly became aware
that I was awake and watching him.
His eyes flew open and he smiled--
a radiant smile which totally transformed his face--
and he moved over to sit on the bed,
still clasping my hand in both of his own.
He murmured my name and
I assured him of my wellbeing.

Kaiidth, his eyes!
Even in the dim light of Sickbay
I could see that they were abnormally bright.
It was as though he had hypnotised me
and I could not tear my eyes from his.

He grasped my upper arms and,
knowing he wished to hold me,
I pulled him close and embraced him.

I lay there, feeling his heart
beat against my chest,
smelling his clean Human scent.
His cheek felt cool against my own.
His rapid breaths were like a gale
to my Vulcan ears and,
at the same time, they tickled.

Our physical contact allowed me
to sense his surface emotions:
acute anxiety transmuting to relief.
Seeking to reassure him
I again repeated that I was quite recovered.
Suddenly he drew back and I sensed
his emotional change from relief
to embarrassment at his own temerity.
I had to do something...
and now!

I reached up to touch his smooth cheeks,
cupping his face in my hands,
His eyes widened in surprise at first,
but then he reached to cover my hands with his own
and gave a tentative smile.
I ceased to control my facial expressions
and allowed all I felt for him
to be read plainly on my face.

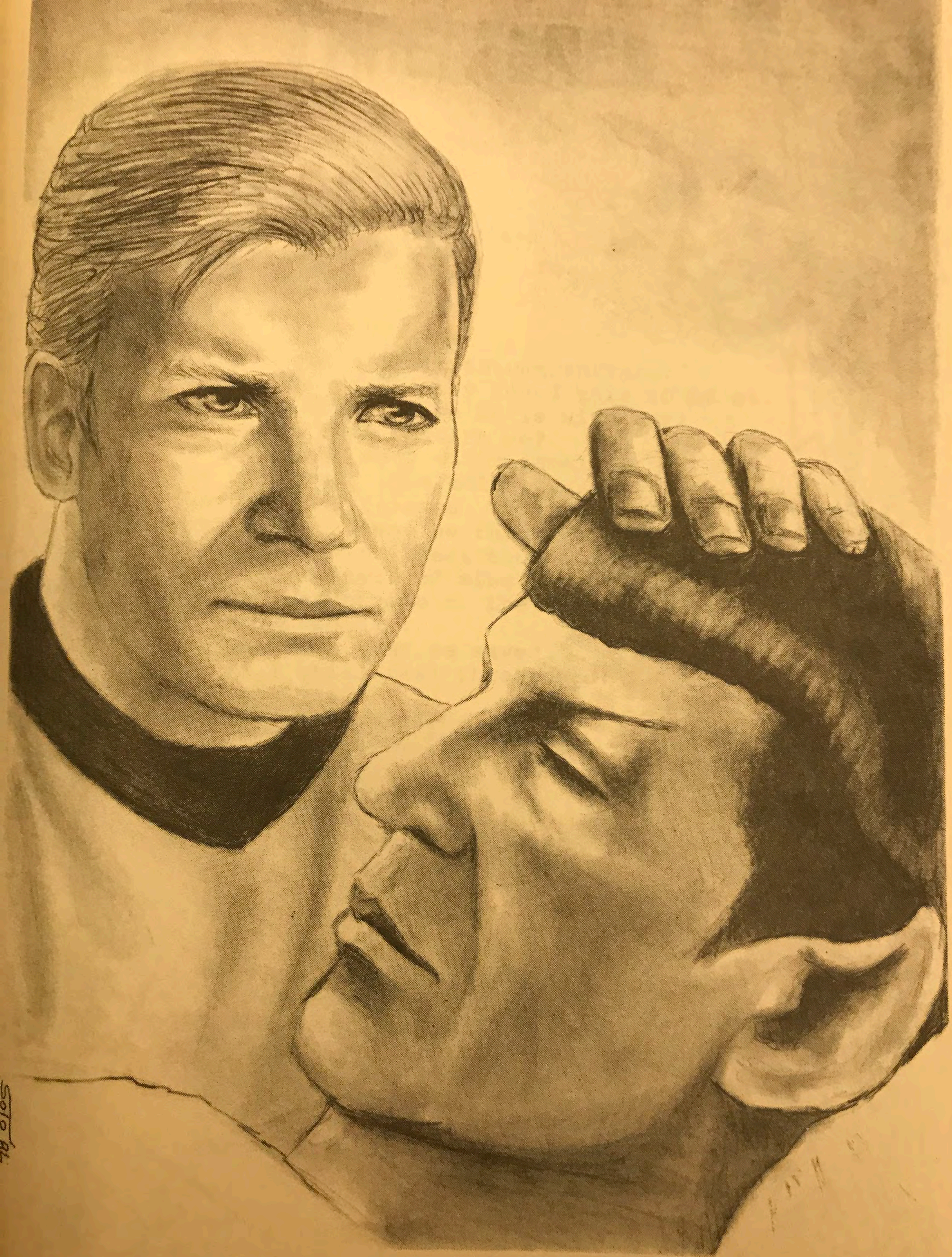
I watched his expression change.
He was watching my eyes as though
unable to quite believe what he saw there but,
at the same time,
desperately wanting to.
Again I sought to reassure him
that I not only understood,
but welcomed his behavior and actions.

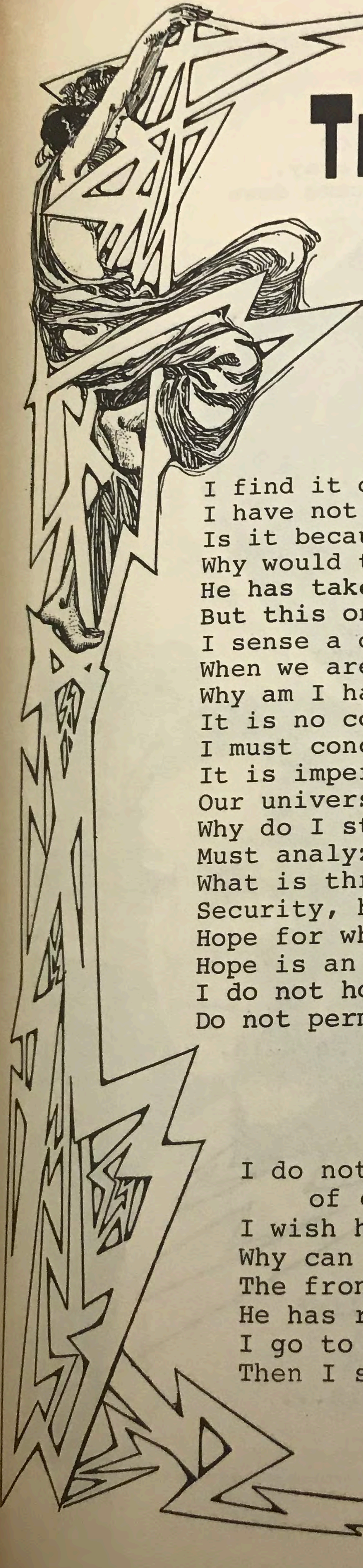
I released my mental barriers completely then
and felt his emotions wash over me.
Worry, concern, affection, relief...
and something which was much stronger
than all of these.

The term for this emotion
no longer exists in the Vulcan language,
but Humans have a name for it--
they call it love--
as, indeed, do I.

I look at him now and I can see the
desire smouldering in his eyes.
"Tomorrow," he whispers, and leaves,
pulling the aura of command about him
like a protective cloak.

I drift off to sleep,
anticipating the morrow.
Perhaps there is logic in loving you
after all.

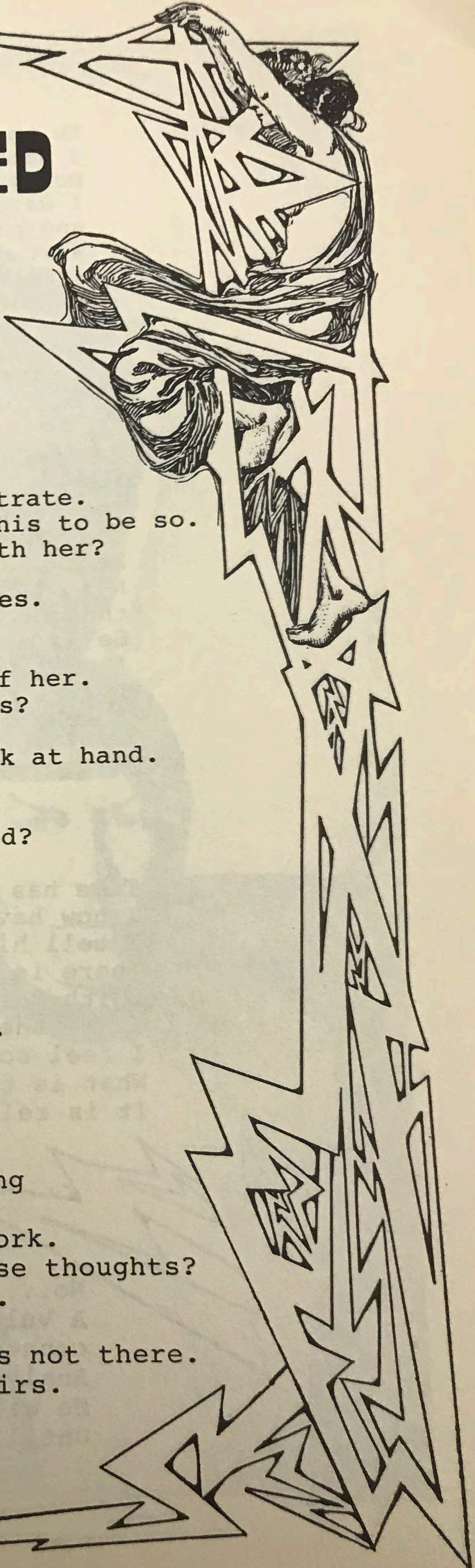




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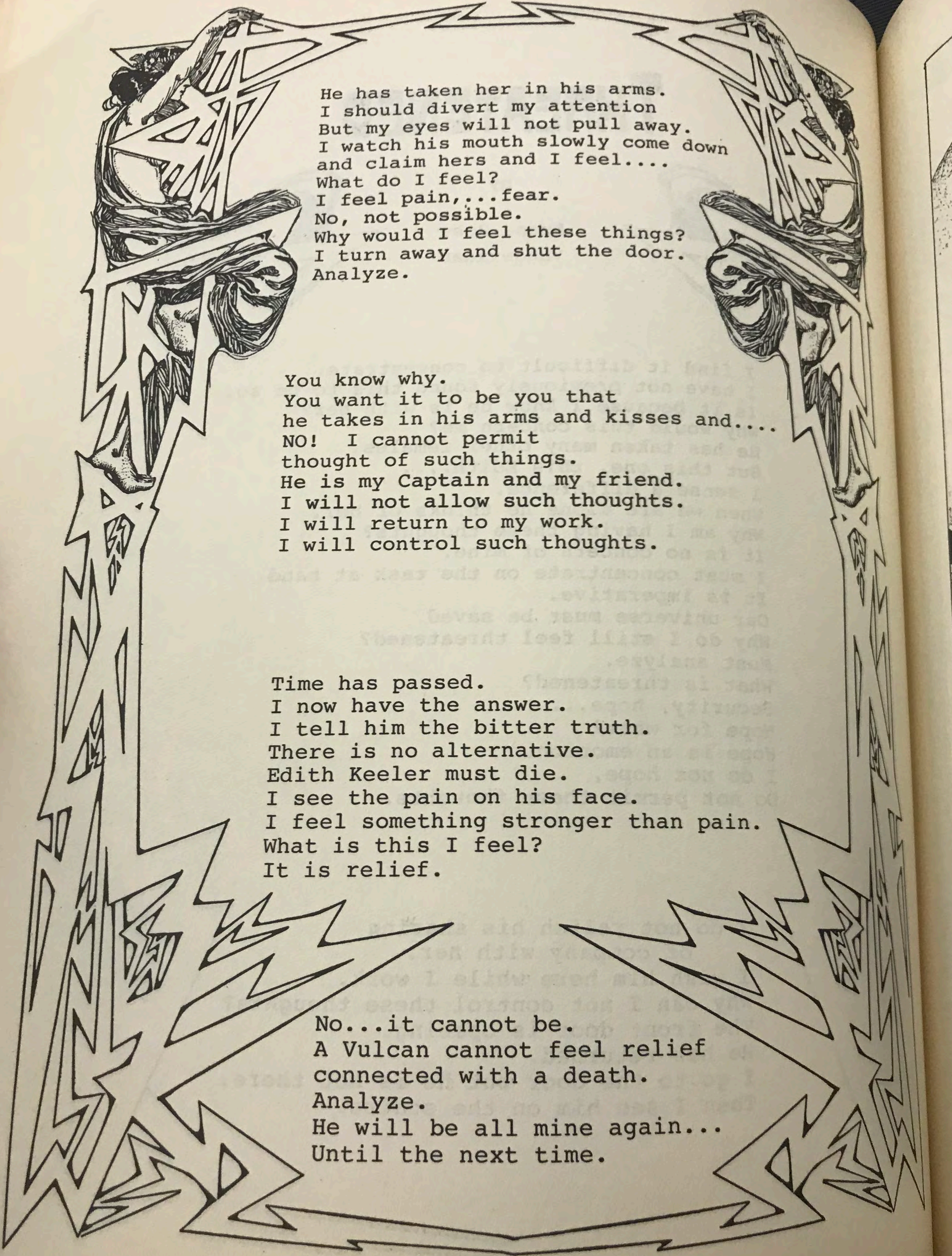
by

Donna Rose
Vanderlaan



I find it difficult to concentrate.
I have not previously found this to be so.
Is it because I know he is with her?
Why would this concern me?
He has taken many other females.
But this one, this Edith....
I sense a difference.
When we are alone he thinks of her.
Why am I having these thoughts?
It is no concern of mine.
I must concentrate on the task at hand.
It is imperative.
Our universe must be saved.
Why do I still feel threatened?
Must analyze.
What is threatened?
Security, hope...
Hope for what?
Hope is an emotion.
I do not hope,
Do not permit these thoughts.

I do not relish his sharing
of company with her.
I wish him here while I work.
Why can I not control these thoughts?
The front door is opening.
He has returned.
I go to the door but he is not there.
Then I see him on the stairs.

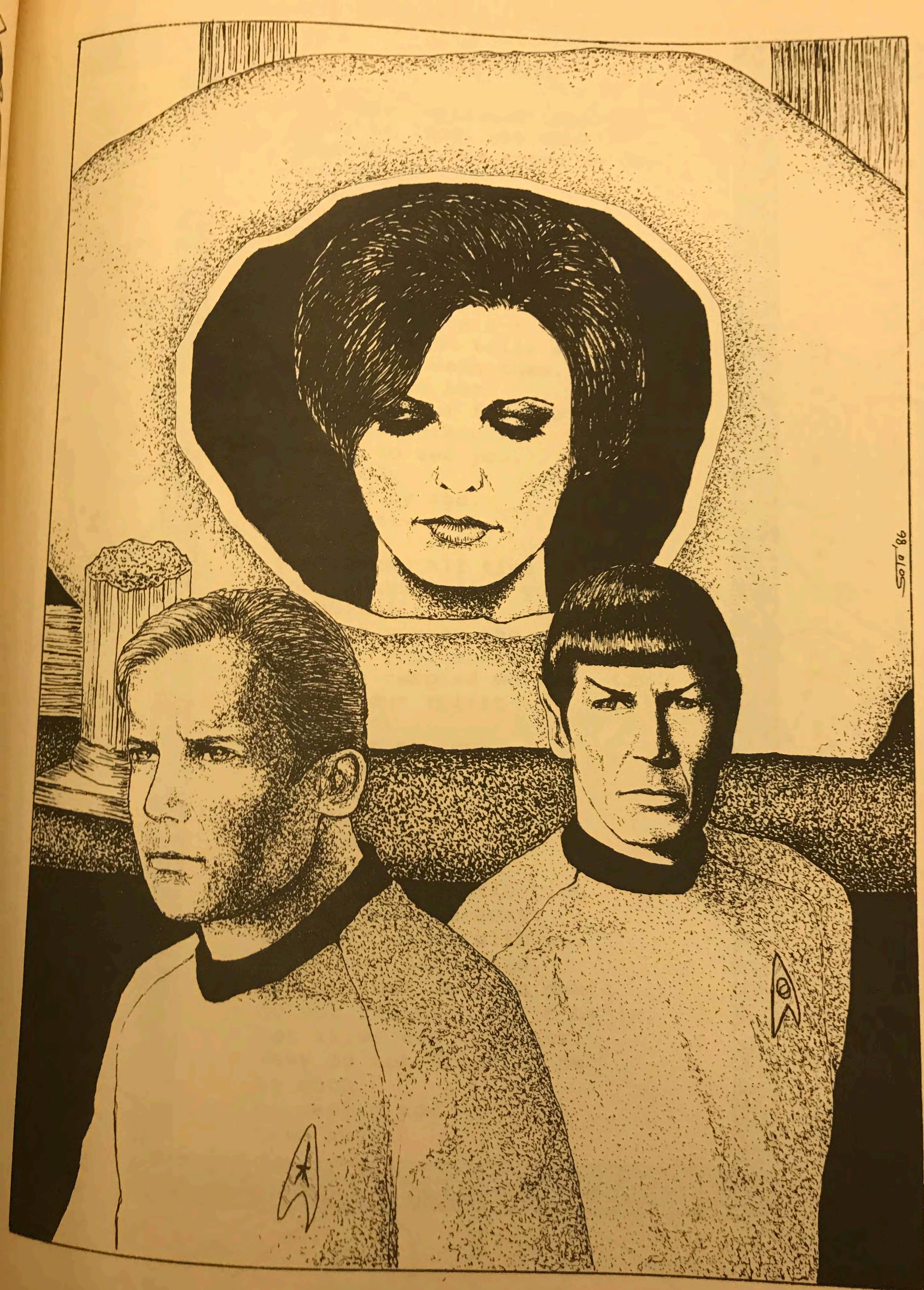


He has taken her in his arms.
I should divert my attention
But my eyes will not pull away.
I watch his mouth slowly come down
and claim hers and I feel....
What do I feel?
I feel pain,...fear.
No, not possible.
Why would I feel these things?
I turn away and shut the door.
Analyze.

You know why.
You want it to be you that
he takes in his arms and kisses and....
NO! I cannot permit
thought of such things.
He is my Captain and my friend.
I will not allow such thoughts.
I will return to my work.
I will control such thoughts.

Time has passed.
I now have the answer.
I tell him the bitter truth.
There is no alternative.
Edith Keeler must die.
I see the pain on his face.
I feel something stronger than pain.
What is this I feel?
It is relief.

No....it cannot be.
A Vulcan cannot feel relief
connected with a death.
Analyze.
He will be all mine again...
Until the next time.

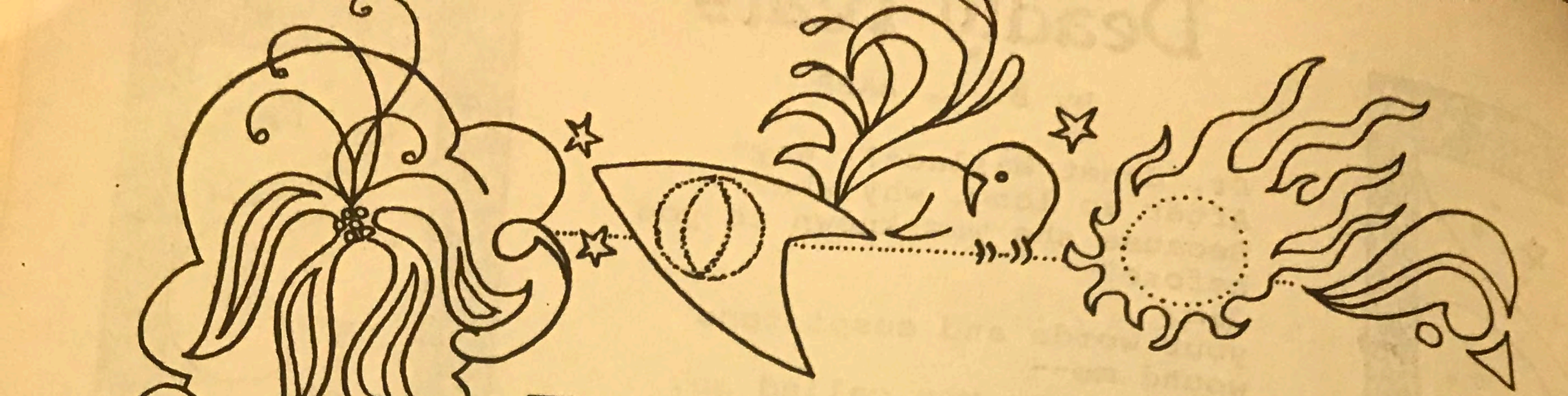


501a '86

Deadly Fears

By B. L. BARR

Dr. Janet Wallace? Why?
After so long, why she?
Because she was known to you
before?
Jim,
your words and suspicions
wound me--
Traitorous, you called me,
disloyal.
Never want to
look at me again--
Though reason tells me
you do not mean them.
You turn to her
to salve your fragile ego
Ashamed, perhaps,
for me to see you,
your body
changed by age.
Illogical.
Love
transcends all time
And though I find your body
beautiful
(seeing you on the screen
without your shirt,
how you tempted me...)
It is your spirit
your soul
that I most love.
Hurt, confused,
but still undimmed
by age.
You remain
uniquely you.
There is so little time
Do not push me away.
Grow old along with me,
your poet once said.
Old age and certain death
do not frighten me, t'hy'la.
Not if we are together.
They do not frighten me
as much
as seeing you
turn away.



The Captain's Fantasy

by John Eliot Lowell

Spirit of the ENTERPRISE--

Beautiful she-being with a computer for a heart--

Do you have pointed ears

Like my other Love?

Do you play a Vulcan harp

As he does?

Do you watch over me,

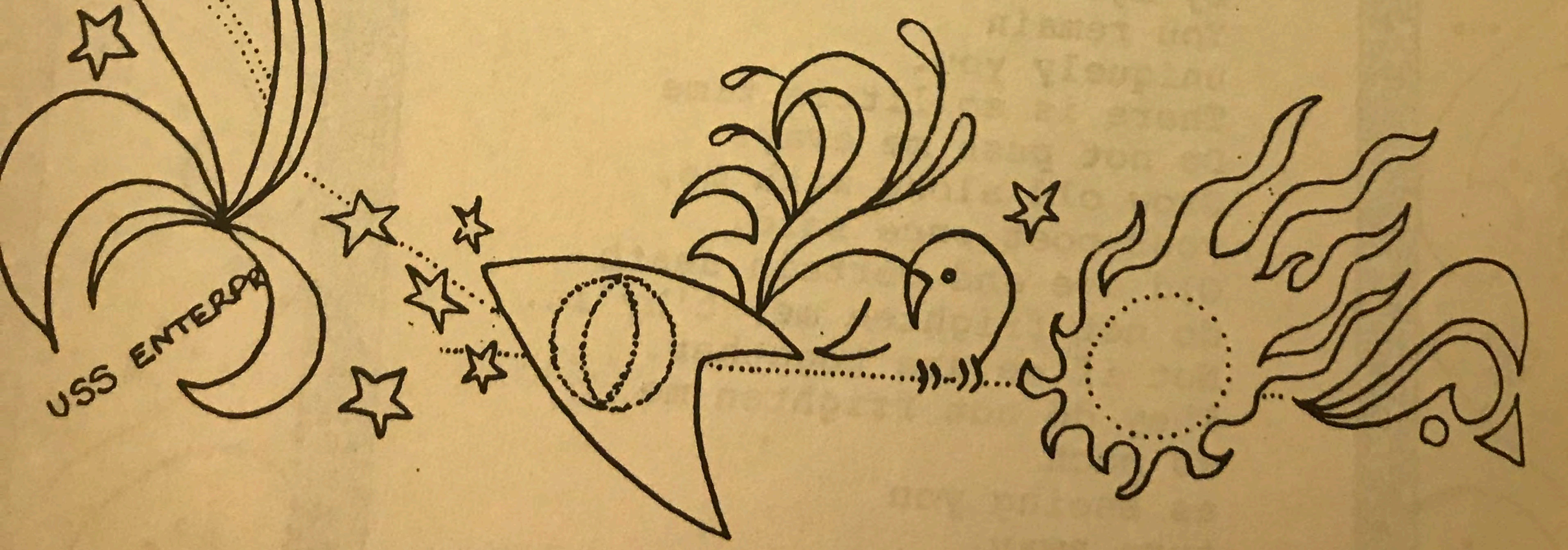
Guard my well-being?

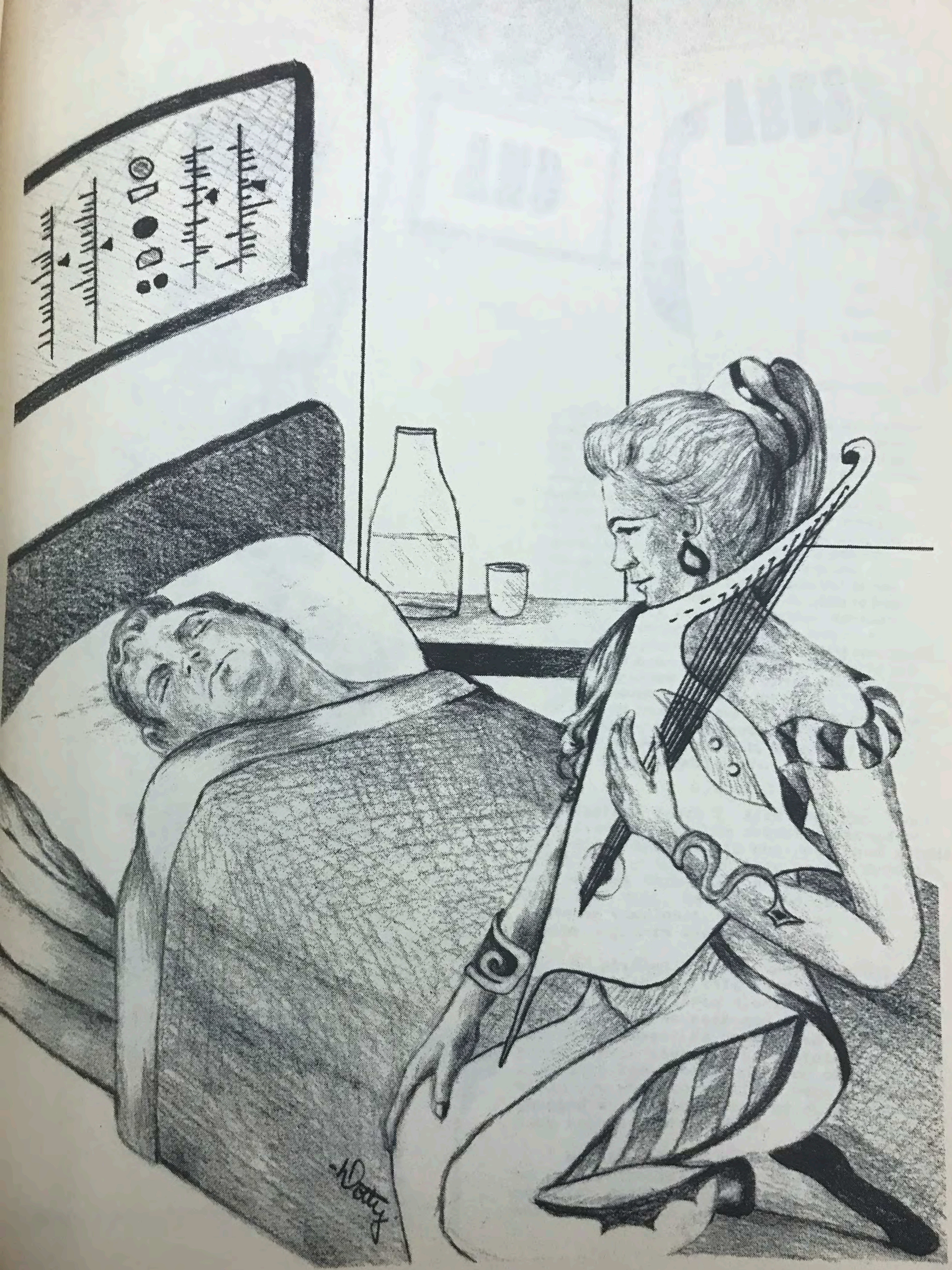
Are you faithful as my other Love,

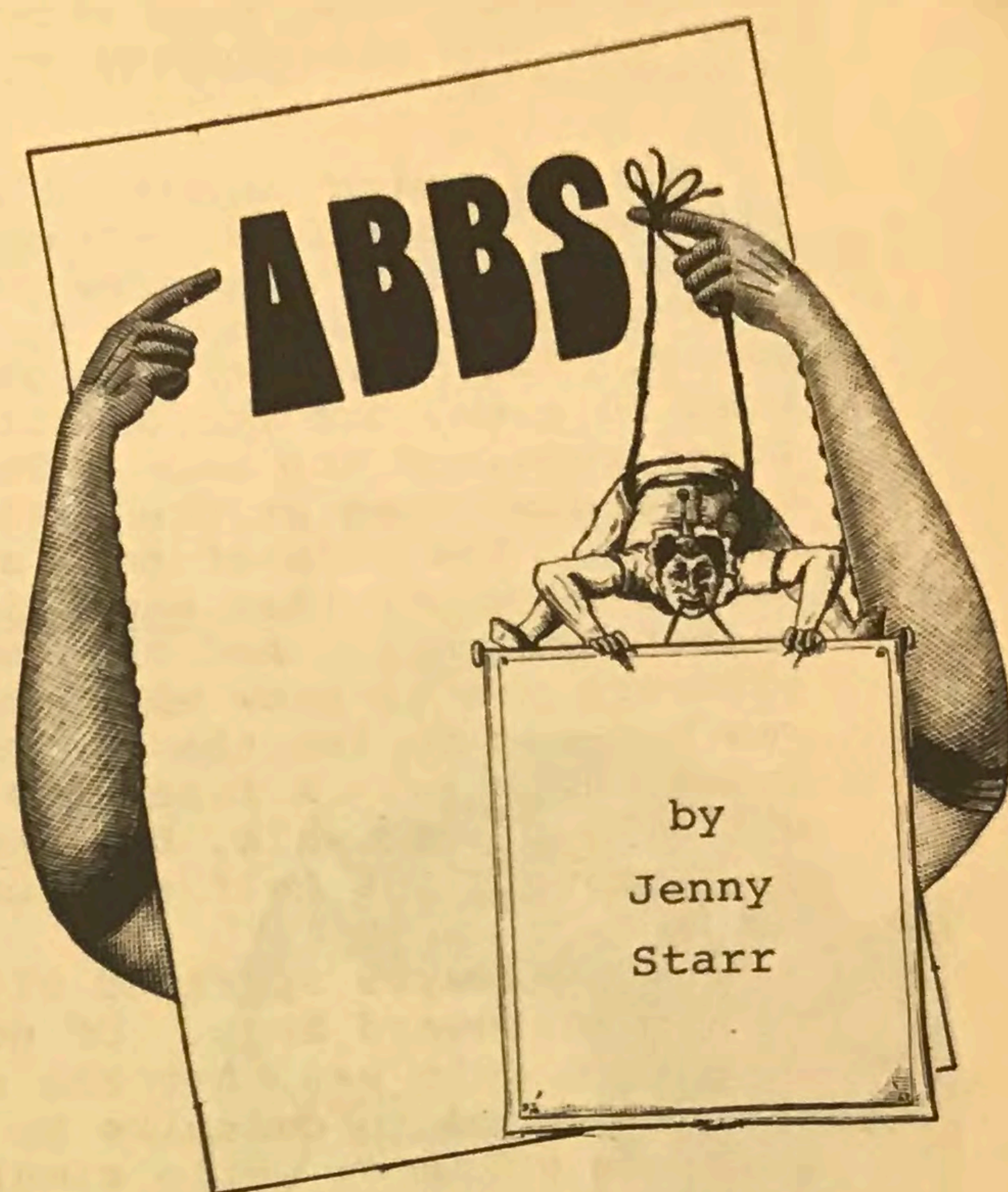
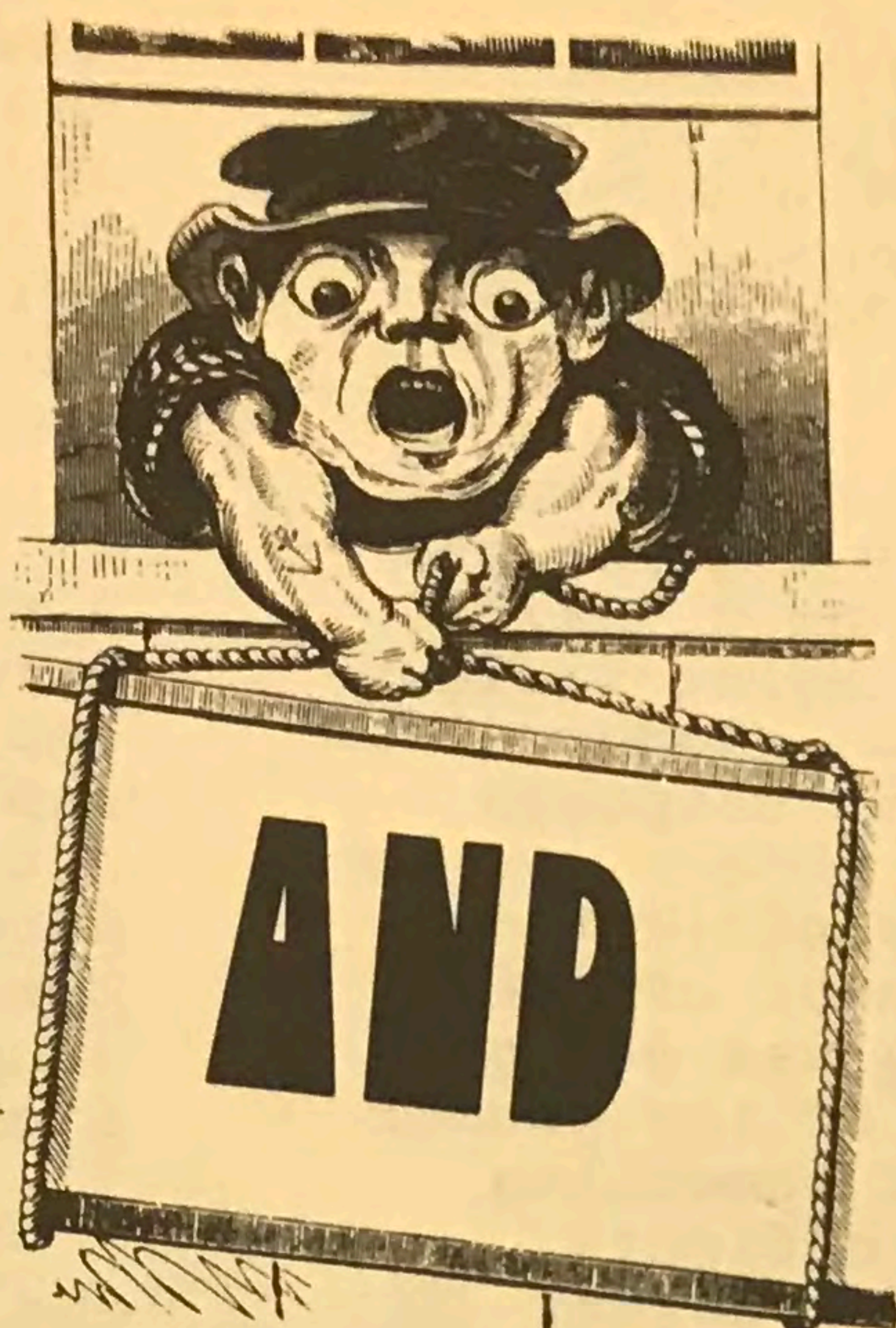
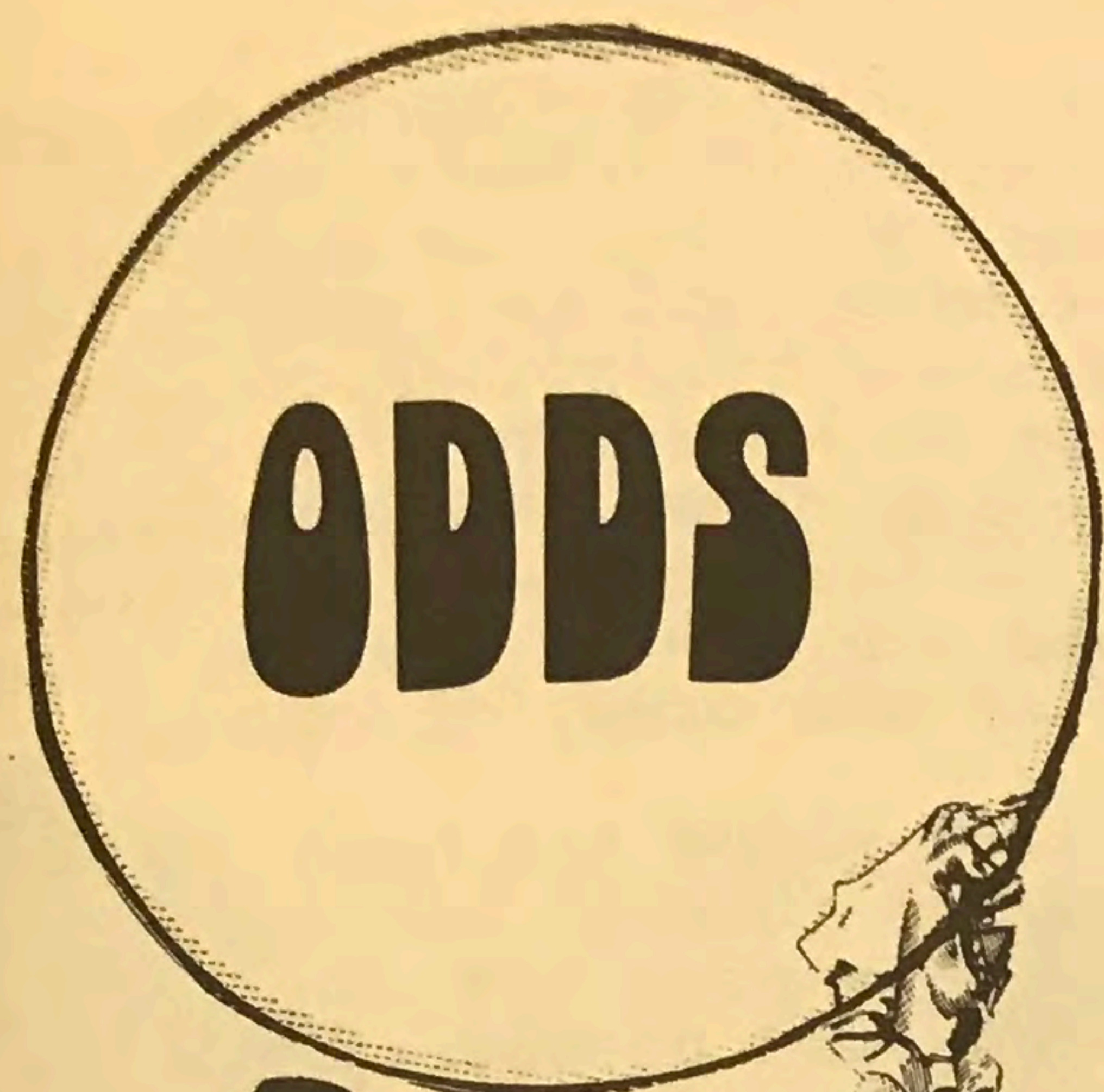
Or fickle and capricious?

Do you dress as a slavegirl, or a queen?

You are both, to me!







Jenny lives in the heart of Kansas with a very patient architect husband, one juvenile delinquent daughter, and three disagreeable cats. When she isn't writing K/S, she occupies her time with a career as an office manager for an architectural firm (a rival of her husband's firm) and works at seeing just how long she can stretch out a college education. Having now run through the entire curriculum at her local university, however, she is being forced to graduate this spring with a B.A. in English Literature. After a suitable period of R&R (which could last as long as 10 years if she works it right), she plans to begin earning an M.F.A. in Creative Writing. Her hobbies are reading, writing, collecting Star Trek series memorabilia, procrastinating, and avoiding housework. Her husband knows and accepts the fact that he will always play second fiddle to a certain starship captain. His only request is that when she is finally beamed up one of these days, she leave him a note on the refrigerator explaining her disappearance so that he can take the Kirk pictures off the walls, find himself a normal woman, and get on with his life.

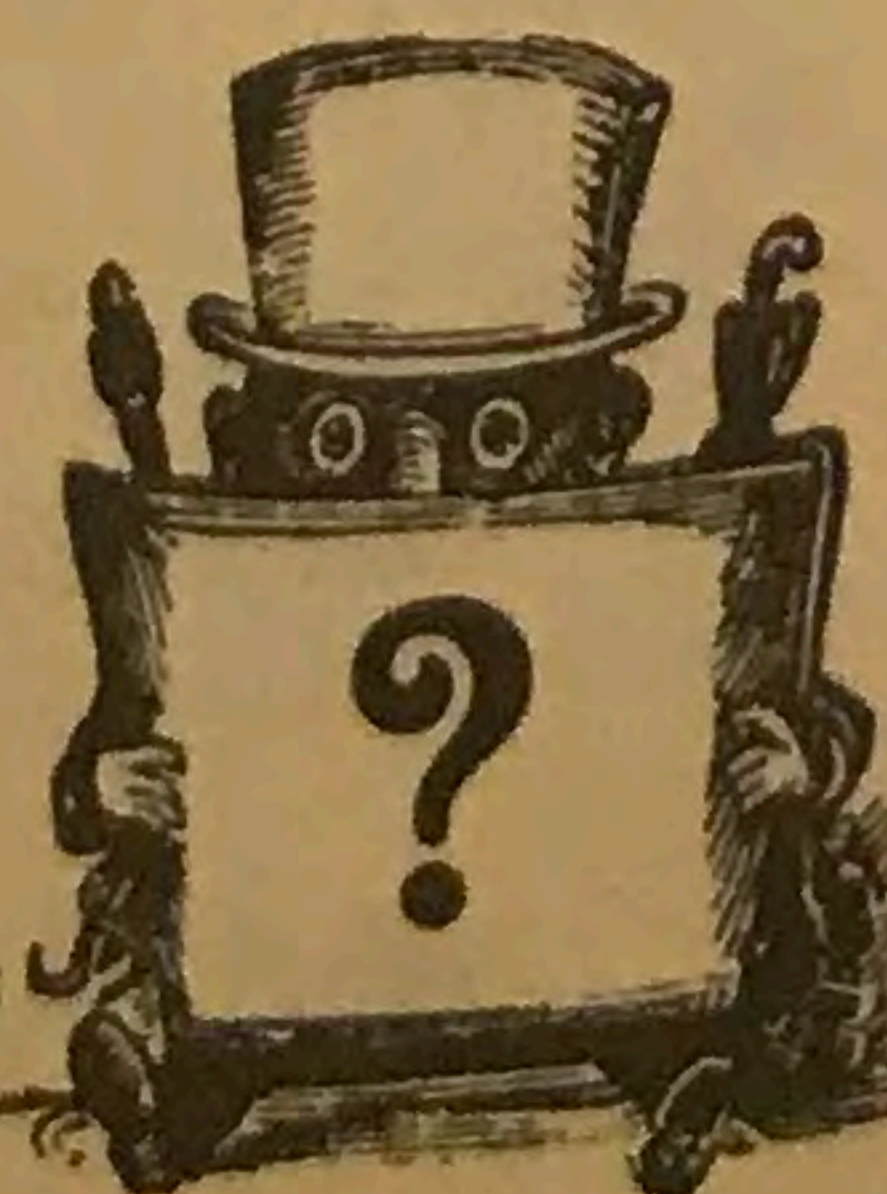
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

Captain James T. Kirk took one final, mystified look at the cryptic message on the wall, finished his business, and strode briskly from the Deck Five head. Entering the nearest turbolift and ordering it to Officers' Mess, he reflected on the increasing complexity of the games of the junior officers and enlisted men.

He stifled a grin. Any starship captain worth his salt knew the importance of keeping the lines clearly drawn between officers and the rank and file. But, he reminded himself as he watched the rapidly passing deck lights, any captain worth his salt also knew the importance of keeping a blind eye when those lines were a trifle smudged during long, boring stretches of duty such as starmapping.

He allowed the grin to break free as he further reasoned that most starship captains worth their salt would probably never admit that any aspect of starship

K/S



duty was boring. But this particular captain, although pleading guilty to having the requisite amount of stardust in his eyes, also knew boredom when he saw it. And starmapping was Boring--with a capital B.

So, his mind continued as he rearranged his face into one of captainly dignity and exited the lift, the crew salvaged their sanity during such times by playing various games. The nature of the games changed from time to time, but the unwritten/unspoken rules remained the same. The object was to have a good time at the senior officers' expense. The role of said senior officers was to be aware that something was going on but not what. And the job of the junior officers was to know what that something was but not to let the senior officers know they knew. A fine line for career-minded J.O.s to walk, but then the risk of discovery was half the fun.

Kirk's eyes sparkled with humor as he headed toward mess. Of course, another unwritten rule was that the senior officers were expected to conspire to figure out what was going on while simultaneously giving the credible impression that they didn't give a damn. And the S.O.'s happily cooperated. Discreetly, of course.

He permitted himself the luxury of a chuckle in the deserted corridor. No doubt all this added up to behavior which would be thoroughly frowned upon by Starfleet Command. If they knew about it. But Starfleet Command didn't have to know about everything. He chuckled again. His crew weren't the only ones who had their little games.

Like any exceptional leader, James Kirk knew the importance of morale among those under his command. And these games, he had quickly realized, were valuable in keeping not only morale high but also the mental sharpness of people who at any second could suddenly be required to handle a crisis requiring split-second thinking and action. Short of playing strip shuffleboard on the bridge, he was determined to encourage just about anything that would accomplish his high expectations of crew efficiency.

The same applied to the graffiti wall in the Deck Five head. Several months ago he had noticed an increasing number of game-related "messages" appearing overnight on the wall upon which the sonic urinals were hung. At first, angered that mature servicemen and women would stoop to defacing Fleet property, he considered issuing a command that such activity was to cease immediately. However, upon further observation, he realized that the graffiti were applied with a washable marker, and the messages were neither obscene nor, in most cases, even decipherable to the average eye.

Therefore, deciding that the gamesters really did need a central message center--and for some indiscernible reason they had chosen the head in officers' country for

that purpose--he issued the edict that such graffiti would be permitted on that one wall only, on the conditions that said graffiti be kept innocuous and was washed off once a day. Another concession on his part which Starfleet Command didn't need to know about.

So every morning he was greeted with a new batch of cryptic scrawls on the ever-popular wall, applied stealthily during ship's night and designed to challenge Captain and fellow senior officers to attempt to break the code of the latest Enterprise game. And the latest Enterprise game, so far at least, had thoroughly stumped the S.O.'s. To the complete delight of the crew, of course.

Kirk shook his head in puzzlement and walked through the door of the Officers' Mess. Obtaining his usual morning rations of coffee and blueberry donut from the food selectors, he joined Spock, McCoy, and Scott at what had become, unofficially, "their" table.

"Good morning, gentlemen." He circulated a smile before biting into his breakfast.

"Morning, Jim," McCoy answered sleepily as he eyed the donut with his habitual look of disapproval.

"Captain," Spock and Scott chorused.

Kirk took a cautious sip of the hot coffee and winced. It always seemed ironic to him that a technology that could send people to other star systems and back couldn't manage to come up with a decent cup of coffee for those same people. But like everyone else in the service, he had long ago come to the conclusion that bad coffee was better than no coffee at all.

Spock, the exception to this philosophy, brought his cup of herb tea to his lips and studied his Captain over the rim. "You appear to be distracted by something this morning, Captain."

Kirk smiled at his First Officer, warmed as always by the Vulcan's keen perception of his moods. "Oh, just trying to figure out the latest graffito."

He tilted his head and rubbed his chin thoughtfully with a coffee cup-warmed finger. "What do you suppose K slash S means?"

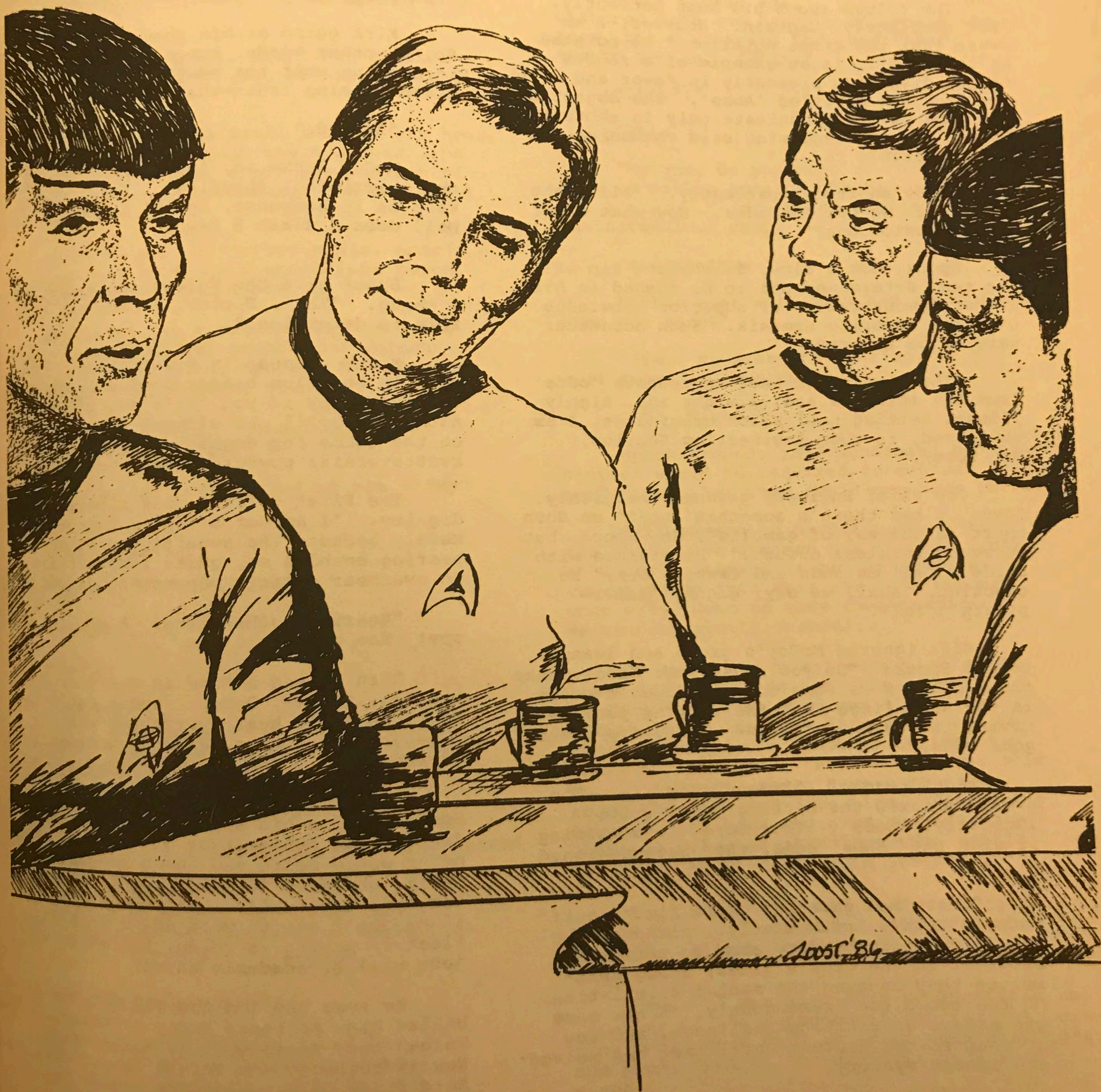
McCoy took a bite of his toast. "K slash what?"

"K slash S. Here." Kirk used the end of his finger to draw on the table in the spilled powdered sugar from Scott's donut: "K/S". "With a question mark after it. And right under that is...." He drew again: "2:1".

All three officers stared at the mysterious message engraved in sugar.

McCoy shrugged. "You got me."





Montgomery Scott shook his head in bafflement and took another bite of his donut, coating lips and chin with the overly-abundant white confectioner's stuff. "Who knows? All those scrawlin's are poppycock to me."

Spock tilted one eyebrow and looked superior. "What you are discussing is the latest manifestation of two currently popular 'games', gentlemen, which have been combined in order to...."

"Spock!" Kirk grinned. "You've figured it out!"

The Vulcan shook his head patiently. "Not completely, Captain. However, I am aware that the first notation," he pointed at the "K/S", "is an example of a recreational diversion presently in favor and which the crew has entitled 'Abbs'. The object of the game is to communicate only in abbreviations, thereby rendering said communication indecipherable to...."

McCoy snorted impatiently. "All right, all right, we get the idea. Now what about the two colon one?"

Spock took a slow, deliberate sip of his tea, determined not to be rushed in his latest demonstration of superior knowledge over his favorite nemesis. Such occasions were to be savored.

"The 'two colon one' represents 'odds' from the infamous and, I might add, highly illegal betting pool which originates, I am convinced, in your Engineering Section, Mr. Scott."

The Chief Engineer grinned sheepishly. "Aye. I ken there's somethin' goin' on doon there in the way of gamblin', Mr. Spock, but it seems harmless enough." He flushed with pride. "An' ma lads and lassies are," he chuckled, "shall we say, mighty 'enterprisin'' folk."

Kirk ignored McCoy's groan and leaned toward Spock. "So you're saying, Spock, that the K slash S is some sort of coded message in the Abbs lingo that the betting pool is giving two to one odds on? Those are pretty good odds."

Spock nodded. "Indeed, Captain. The crew has named the betting game, quite logically, 'Odds'. Therefore, in combining it with the 'Abbs' code, they have designed a...."

"Whole new game for us to figure out!" McCoy chortled triumphantly. Although the S.O.'s were expected to show no official interest in the crew's games, among themselves they enjoyed the mental stimulation of the exercises tremendously. A new game was always an exciting challenge, and few of them rested content until they had solved the latest mystery.

"Well." Kirk sat back in his chair, crossed his arms over his chest, and pursed his lips thoughtfully. "That explains the enigmatic whispering I overheard between

Sulu and Chekov on the bridge yesterday. Sounded like backwards Greek to me, but obviously they were talking in abbreviations." He glanced at Spock again. "And the odds on the head wall?"

"From what I have been able to ascertain," said Spock, warming up to his subject while assuming a cool, disinterested front, "someone leaves a message on the wall each day concerning a topic about which he or she is interested. A representative from the Engineering betting pool then enters the room sometime during ship's night and writes the 'odds' concerning the probability of said topic. Interested crew members may then place their 'bets' accordingly."

Kirk gazed at him thoughtfully. "Hmmm. So, in other words, somebody was interested in knowing what the odds are on this K slash S being true--whatever the devil it is."

"Indeed."

McCoy broke in, impatient with all the theoretical foreplay. "Well, don't keep us in suspense, Spock! What the Hell does K slash S mean?"

Spock gave the Vulcan equivalent of a shrug. "That, Doctor, I have not been able to determine."

McCoy groaned in frustration. "Well, what in the blue blazes good does it do us to have a spy if you can't get us the real nitty gritty?!" He slammed his hand down on the table for emphasis, jarring the controversial powdered sugar message.

The First Officer drew himself up with dignity. "I am not a 'spy', Doctor McCoy. Merely because the sensitivity of my hearing enables me, quite involuntarily, to overhear certain conversations which...."

"Hearing, schmearing! A spy is a spy! Now why don't you...."

Kirk raised a hand in weary arbitration. "Down, Bones. Spock can't help it if he can't hear everything when he eavesdrops...I mean, when he accidentally overhears...."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Spock stiffen his spine even more and decided the better side of valor at that point would be to end the conversation. "Well, whatever it means, we'll crack the code eventually. We always do. Now if we don't get to work doing what Starfleet is paying us to do, the whole subject will be academic anyway."

He rose and led the way out the door. Behind him, he heard McCoy grumbling, "Damn Vulcan only hears what he wants to hear. Now if somebody was talkin' about computers, he'd break an ear listenin' in...." and Spock's offended, "Doctor, that comment I was able to overhear quite clearly. It is illogical that I should be expected to hear only what I wish to hear. Your statement was uncalled for and...."

Kirk sighed and rolled his eyes ceilingward.



Late that ship's night, the interior of Captain Kirk's cabin was bathed in soft light, and equally soft moans were coming from the direction of the sleeping quarters. On the bunk, two figures writhed passionately on sweat-soaked sheets, as though testing the boundaries of the narrow surface with their bodies.

"One more jerk like that, Spock, and you're going to knock both of us right off onto the floor," the Captain whispered with uneven breath.

"I cannot help it, Jim," his First Officer gasped. "What you are doing always makes me...ohh...."

Kirk grinned and again lowered his head, blowing cool air through the O of his lips upon his lover's most sensitive portion of anatomy. "Like that, hmmm? And how about this? And this?"

Spock moaned and jerked again, nearly toppling them from their precarious perch. "Jim...please do that again...."

His lover ran a maddeningly enticing finger lightly across overheated Vulcan skin. "Do what again, Spock?" he whispered teasingly. "I did three things."

Spock shuddered. "The...second activity, Jim. Please," he choked.

Kirk smiled lovingly up at him. "My pleasure, lover."

"Yes...ohhh...."

"Spock...."

"Mmmmmmm...."

"Spock?"

"Hmmmmmm?"

"When are you going to find out for me what K slash S means?"

"I...mmmmmm...already...ohhh...have."

"What?!" Kirk sat up abruptly and stared at him. "Why haven't you told me?"

Spock's eyes shot open with shock at the sudden cessation of pleasurable sensations. "Jim...." he groaned.

"What does it mean?"

Making an effort to control his breathing, the Vulcan raised his upper body on elbows and stared somewhat resentfully at the Human. "Jim, has anyone ever told you that your sense of timing can be most irritating? I had planned to tell you...later. Now if you would continue...."

Kirk sat straighter and folded his arms stubbornly across his bare chest. His eyes glinting with mischievous gold lights, he whispered sensuously, "Not until you tell me what K slash S means."

Spock sighed and collapsed gracefully back onto the bed. There would be no distracting Jim until he had found out what he wanted to know.

"This," he said in his most resigned tone.

"This? What do you mean 'this'?"

Spock sighed again, patiently, and gestured with one hand to encompass the room, the disheveled bed, and their sweaty bodies. "This."

"THIS?!"

"This."

"My god, do you mean to tell me my crew is making bets on whether or not you and I are...." His voice trailed off into an incredulous gasp.

"Affirmative."

Kirk's eyes were wide and pleading. "Are you sure?"

"Jim. My sense of hearing, as you well know, is impeccable."

"Oh. Right."

Spock sighed, idly wondering how many minutes would be required to exhaust the subject so that they could get back to....

Kirk seemed to have recovered from the shock. He drummed his fingers lightly on Spock's stomach as he sat staring thoughtfully into thin air. "I wonder what we've done to make them suspicious? We've been pretty careful...."

Enjoying the novel sensation of the staccato touches on his skin, Spock watched the Human hand and sighed again. Obviously, a complete discussion was in order before Jim's stubborn curiosity would be appeased. "From what I was able to...overhear...there have been rumors among the crew for some time. Apparently, however, the odds improved considerably when you directed that less than subtle 'wink' at me on the bridge yesterday."

"Oh, yeah. I guess that was pretty stupid of me. I just couldn't help it. It just...slipped out."

"Mmm. I was also able to ascertain the identity of the representative from the betting pool whose duty it is to determine odds and place them on the graffiti wall each night."

Kirk unconsciously slapped the Vulcan's hip in his excitement. "Great, Spock! Now we'll know who their spy is! Who is it?"

Spock's brain considered the sensation of the small slap on already sensitive skin, decided it was pleasurable, and sent the message on down to Spock's body. "Lieutenant Kevin Riley. Jim, now may we...."

"Riley! I should have known. As a floating backup between Engineering and navigation, he's the perfect snitch to keep the betting pool informed of what's going on up on the bridge. That boy's got eyes in the back of his head. He'll make a Hell of a captain one of these days--if he can learn to mind his own business."

Spock sighed and glanced at the bedside chronometer. At this rate, morning would arrive before....

Kirk hunkered down to serious business. "Spock, we've got to do something to confuse the opposition and get their attention off us."

"Indeed. Perhaps one of your less than subtle winks directed at someone else?"

"Are you kidding? The last time I winked innocently at Chekov you didn't speak to me for three days!"

Spock cleared his throat. "That was in my more insecure days of our relationship, Jim."

Kirk was trailing a distracted finger across Spock's left thigh as he thought, unaware of the suddenly ragged breathing in the body beneath his hand. "That's not a bad idea, though. I could sort of flirt with one or two others on the bridge, and word would get around that the Captain is just being generally flirtatious. Considering my legendary behavior in my pre-Spock days, it shouldn't do my reputation any harm." He grinned. "Probably do it some good, in fact."

Spock sneaked another look at the chronometer. "Agreed. Jim, the hour is quite late. Perhaps we should...."

"Okay, so that's the plan. Tomorrow I'll spread my famous charm around a little, and we'll just see what pops up on the old graffiti wall tomorrow night for Mr. Riley's odds."

Losing all patience, Spock grabbed the distracted hand and placed it purposefully on his over-strained anatomy. "Jim, it is tomorrow already. Enough is enough of discussion. And please remind me later to apprise you of my opinion concerning your reprehensible methods of extracting information from me."

Kirk laughed softly and turned the full force of his charm on his appreciative audience. "Sorry, lover," he whispered seductively. He leaned closer and let his lips follow the trail blazed by his guided hand. "Now where was I?"

Spock sighed contentedly. "You were doing...."

"This?"

"This...."



The following morning, Kirk headed toward the bridge, having gotten a late start due to problems in Engineering which required his presence. Exiting the lift, he valiantly resisted the urge to look at his First Officer and made straight for the center seat.

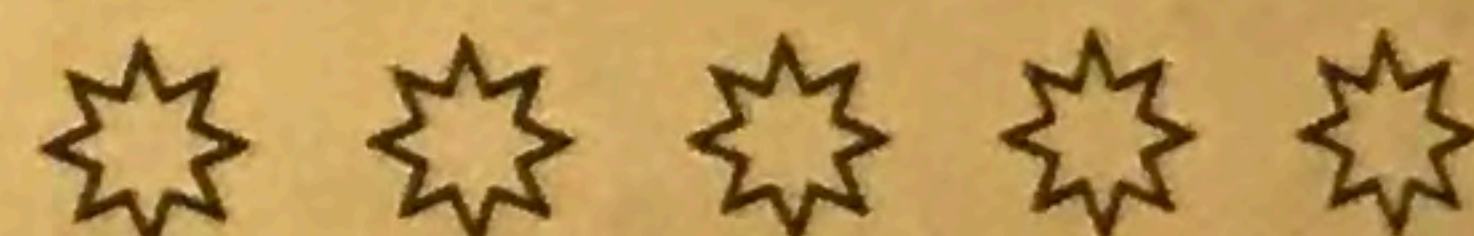
"Mr. Spock," he said casually over his left shoulder, "may I see the bridge roster for today?"

Spock reached for the compu-slate already prepared and waiting at his fingertips and walked toward the command chair. Handing the slate to his Captain, he schooled his face into a disinterested expression, a feat somewhat more difficult to achieve around this particular Human than the average Vulcan would have thought possible.

Being perfectly aware of this, Kirk suppressed a grin and perused the slate. Running his eyes down the list of names, he saw what he was looking for. Kevin Riley was scheduled to fill in at navigation when Chekov took his break at 1400 hours. Perfect.

Returning the slate to Spock with an utterly innocent expression on his face, he turned his attention to the ubiquitous fuel consumption report which was being handed him from the other side by a patiently waiting yeoman. Taking the report, he dismissed his First Officer with a seemingly nonchalant, "Thank you, Mr. Spock."

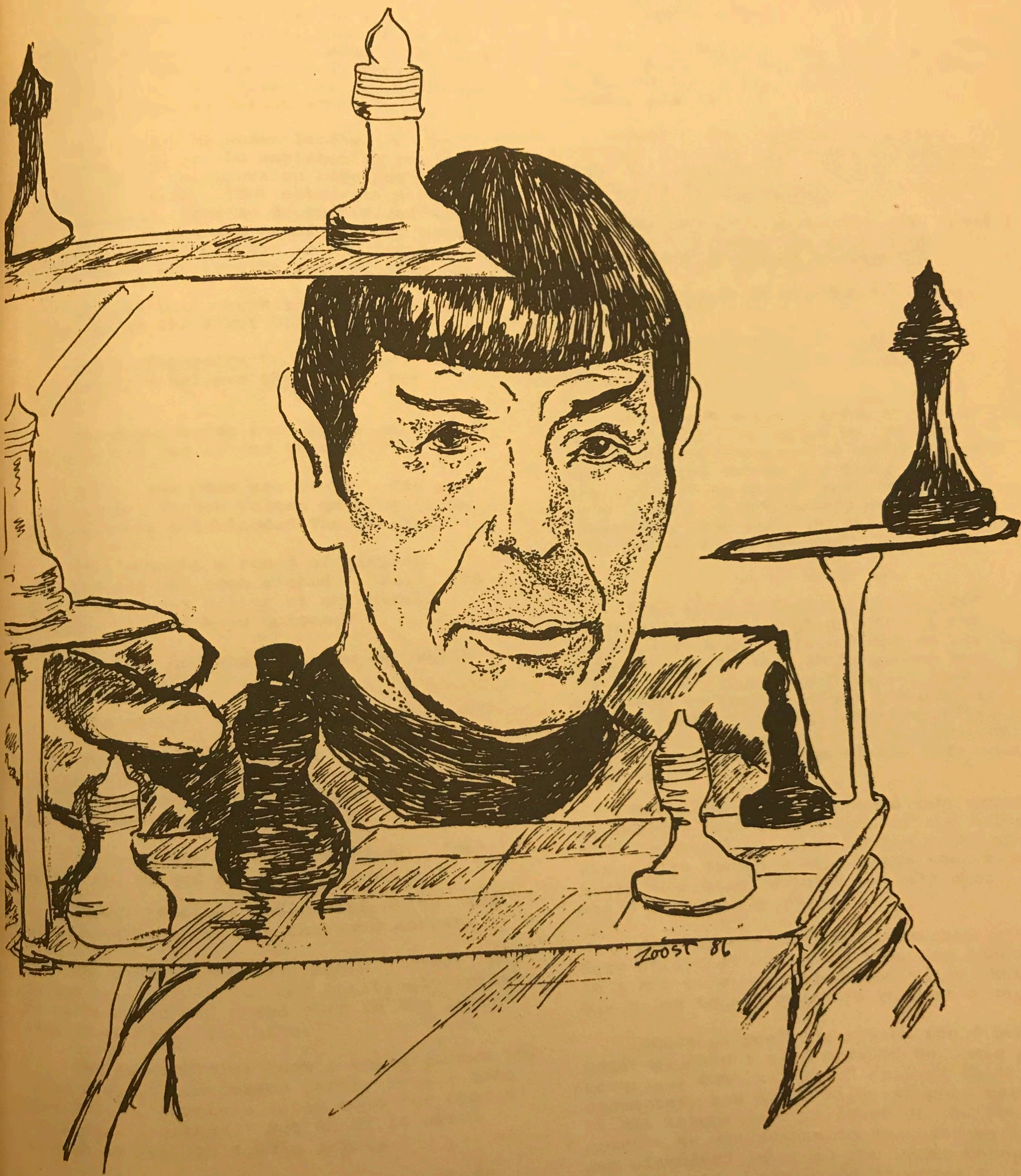
Yes indeed, he smiled to himself. The stage was all set for an interesting afternoon.



At 1100 hours, Spock joined McCoy in one of the smaller rec rooms for lunch. Since the whole idea was to attract attention away from Kirk and Spock, the two had agreed that they would not share their lunch hour together that day. Instead, the Captain would use the time to grab a sandwich and make a dent in the omnipresent mountain of paperwork in his quarters, and Spock would continue his long-standing attempt to teach logical chess maneuvers to Leonard McCoy.

Teacher and pupil found a table in a relatively quiet and out-of-the-way corner behind a dividing screen in Rec Room 3. The doctor, Spock had long ago decided, needed as few distractions as possible in order to concentrate on what was, for him, a thoroughly boring game but one which he was determined to master--if for no other reason than to prove to the skeptical Spock that he could.

However, they had no sooner settled themselves in their chairs and were setting



up the pieces on the board when a noisy group of crewwomen entered through the door. Not seeing the First Officer and CMO behind the screen, and therefore thinking they were alone in the otherwise deserted room, they proceeded to loudly (at least to Vulcan ears) fill in a new med tech on the famous charms of one Captain James T. Kirk. While McCoy concentrated obliviously on his opening move, Spock tuned in to the female gossip.

"And rumor has it that he's a fantastic lay. Of course, none of us can testify personally to that, more's the pity. In fact, we don't know anybody who can testify to it. But rumor has it, nevertheless, and rumor is seldom wrong."

The circle of women laughed at the woebegone tone in the engineering tech's voice, and an astrophysics tech put in her two cents' worth. "But observation has it, unfortunately, that he doesn't sleep with his crew. So you can drool but not touch. Coming on to the Captain is the fastest way I know of to get transferred off this ship."

Someone else chuckled. "Unless you happen to be the First Officer."

The astrophysics tech snorted. "I for one don't believe that rumor for a second."

The engineering tech spoke up. "But the odds are two to one that...."

"Well, the odds are wrong. Can you just see Mr. Virgin Vulcan getting it on with our very hot-blooded Tomcat Kirk?"

That brought a round of giggles. Then the new med tech sighed. "Well, I'd just like to get a look at our heroic Captain. I hear he's gorgeous."

"He is. And whatever you do, watch out for his smile."

"His smile? That irresistable, huh?"

"Irresistible?! An LI is survivable, but an MI will heat up a corpse's blood, and an HI will positively melt your knees right out from under you!"

The med tech sounded confused. "What's an LI, and MI and an...."

"Low-intensity, medium-intensity, and high-intensity," came a chorused answer.

The engineering tech again. "Yeah, his smiles are legendary...and positively lethal. So we've rated and coded them in the interests of survival training."

The astrophysics tech's voice chimed in. "Your average crewperson rarely sees a bona fide HI. Our Captain saves them for special occasions, I gather. But an MI is about as much as you can handle anyway."

"Legend has it that Lieutenant Uhura has been favored with three HI's during her stint here. But Mr. Spock reportedly holds the record for most HI's received in the line of duty. Hence the rumors."

"Yeah, and God only knows how many he gets off duty...."

The astrophysics tech's voice faded out as the door hissed open. Spock peered through the small holes in the mesh divider to see the identity of the new arrival. His mouth quirked in the hint of a smile as he saw the much-discussed Captain himself enter and head for the coffee dispenser.

The engineering tech spoke up. "Uh, Captain Kirk, I'd like you to meet the newest member of your crew, Ensign Barbara Roberts."

Captain Kirk juggled his coffee cup into his left hand and extended his right for a handshake. "Ensign Roberts, welcome to the Enterprise." He smiled.

"Uh, Captain...I'm...er...uh, thank you, sir." Roberts was still stuttering while Kirk disappeared through the door.

She slumped in her chair. "Jesus! What hit me?"

"Down girl, that was only an LI. You've got a lot to learn if you're going to survive here...."

McCoy was still staring at the board and pondering what would be the most illogical opening move he could possibly make when the chattering group exited the room, so he missed what he would have given a year's salary to see--a thoroughly smug smile on the face of the very Vulcan First Officer.

☆☆☆☆☆

Kirk stood and stretched as 1400 hours approached, looking for all the worlds like a man with nothing on his mind more intriguing than an afternoon nap. At the helm console, Chekov leaned back and stretched in tandem, eager for a break from the eye-straining, muscle-stiffening boredom of starmapping. He turned happily when he heard the sound of the lift doors opening.

The events that happened next occurred so swiftly that if the eyes of the bridge crew had not been glued to the right spot, the entire scenario would have been missed. James Kirk made certain that all eyes would be properly glued.

Just as the lift doors swished open, Kirk stretched again, yawned, and announced in a not-to-be-misunderstood voice that he was going to his quarters to take a nap.

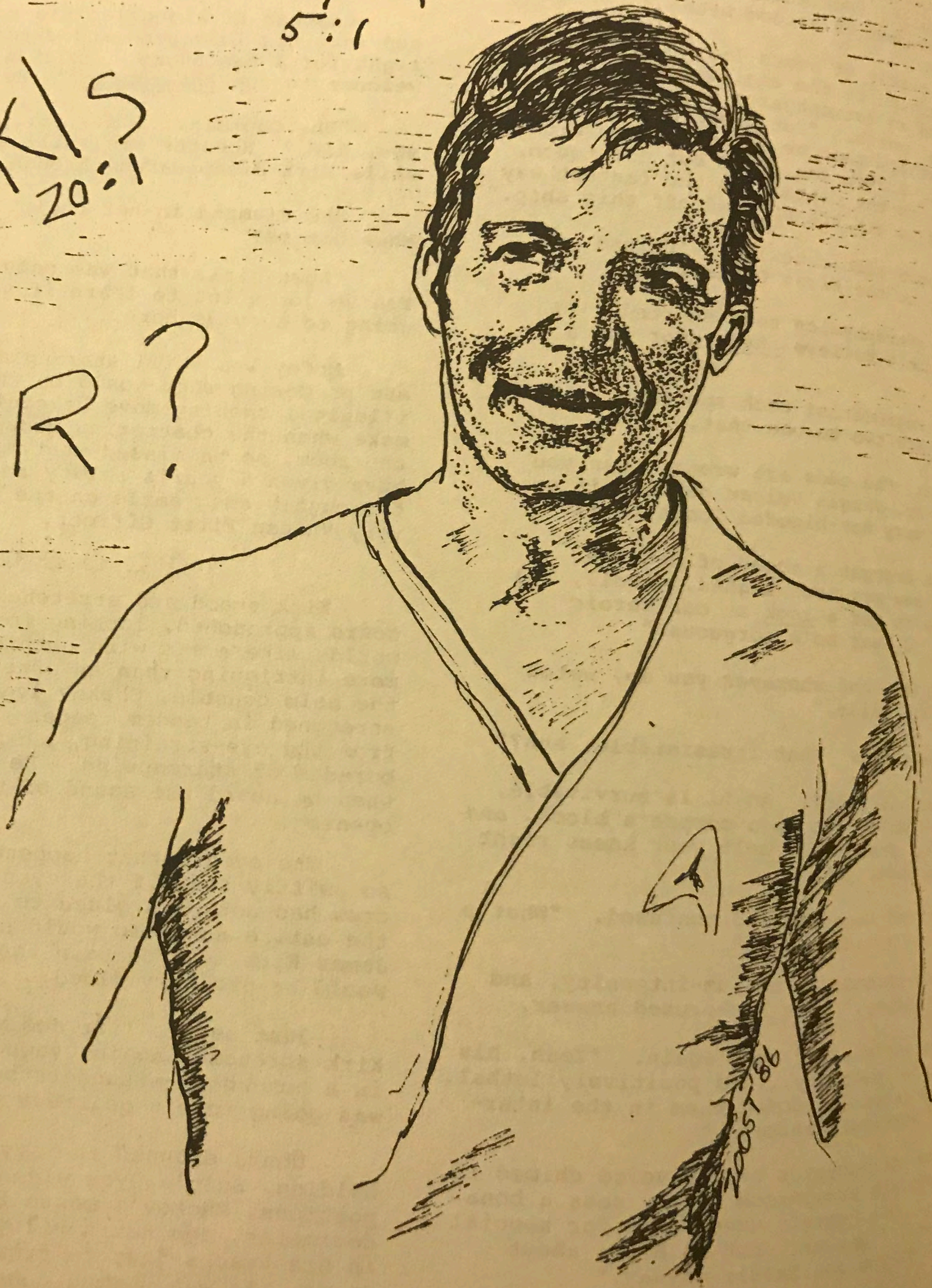
Uhura dropped the stylus she'd been holding, Sulu's eyes widened to comic proportions, Chekov's mouth fell at least a decimeter, and Kevin Riley stopped dead in his tracks just in front of the now closed doors. As was common consensus when the event was discussed later in rec rooms throughout the ship, the likelihood of James T. Kirk taking a nap in the middle of his shift was about the same as that of an Andorian eating one of his own antennae for lunch.

K/C
10:1

K/U
5:1

K/S
20:1

K/R?



A

2005-86

Only Mr. Spock seemed unperturbed. As he calmly went about his duties at the library computer, only a very astute observer would have noticed that he was very carefully watching the entire scene out of the corner of his eye.

After his galaxy-shattering announcement, seemingly unaware that all eyes were trained incredulously upon him, Captain Kirk reached forward and, with a sly wink, ruffled Ensign Chekov's hair. Turning, he walked past Uhura's chair, favored her with another wink, and massaged one red-clad shoulder affectionately. On his way to the lift, he stopped close to a seemingly paralyzed Kevin Riley, gave him a slow, sensuous wink, slid one hand across the astonished lieutenant's chest, and let loose the most dazzling, knee-melting smile any Kirk-watcher had ever seen. Then he disappeared through the lift doors.

Later, when the scene was related by those who'd been there to those who hadn't, the silence on the bridge was described as "deafening". And that, a certain Vulcan thought with a touch of humor, was most illogical...yet utterly factual.



Later that night in the Captain's quarters, two figures once again writhed in sweaty abandon on the narrow bed.

The Human figure worked a path of ardent kisses down the shivering Vulcan figure, alternating each steadily descending kiss with whispered words.

"I do believe...my dear Mr. Spock... that we succeeded in...confusing the K/S gamblers...on the bridge today...."

Vulcan moans alternated with breathless words. "Indeed...Captain...I eagerly anticipate...ohh...tomorrow's odds... mmmmmmm...on the graffiti wall...."

"What did you think...of the smile... I gave to...our Mr. Riley?"

"A most definite...ahhh...HI, Captain...."

Kirk sat up abruptly and stared at him. "Huh? An HI? What the Hell's an HI, Spock?"

"JIM!!"



At 0700 hours the next morning, Captain Kirk strode in no small amount of anticipation toward the Deck Five head. As he entered and locked the door behind him, he gazed eagerly at the wall upon which the sonic urinals were hung and read the following notations:

K/U?	K/C?	K/S?
5:1	10:1	20:1

And under these, scrawled bigger and bolder than the others, as though with an impatiently excited hand, was the following:

K/R?

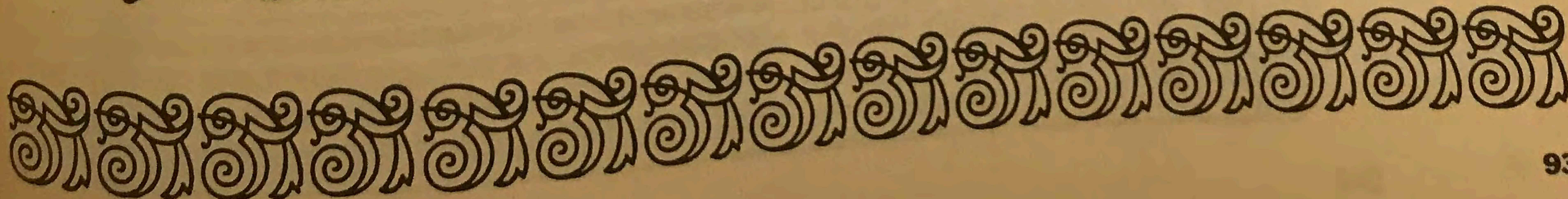
The space below this notation--the space where the odds were supposed to be filled in--was ominously and stubbornly blank.

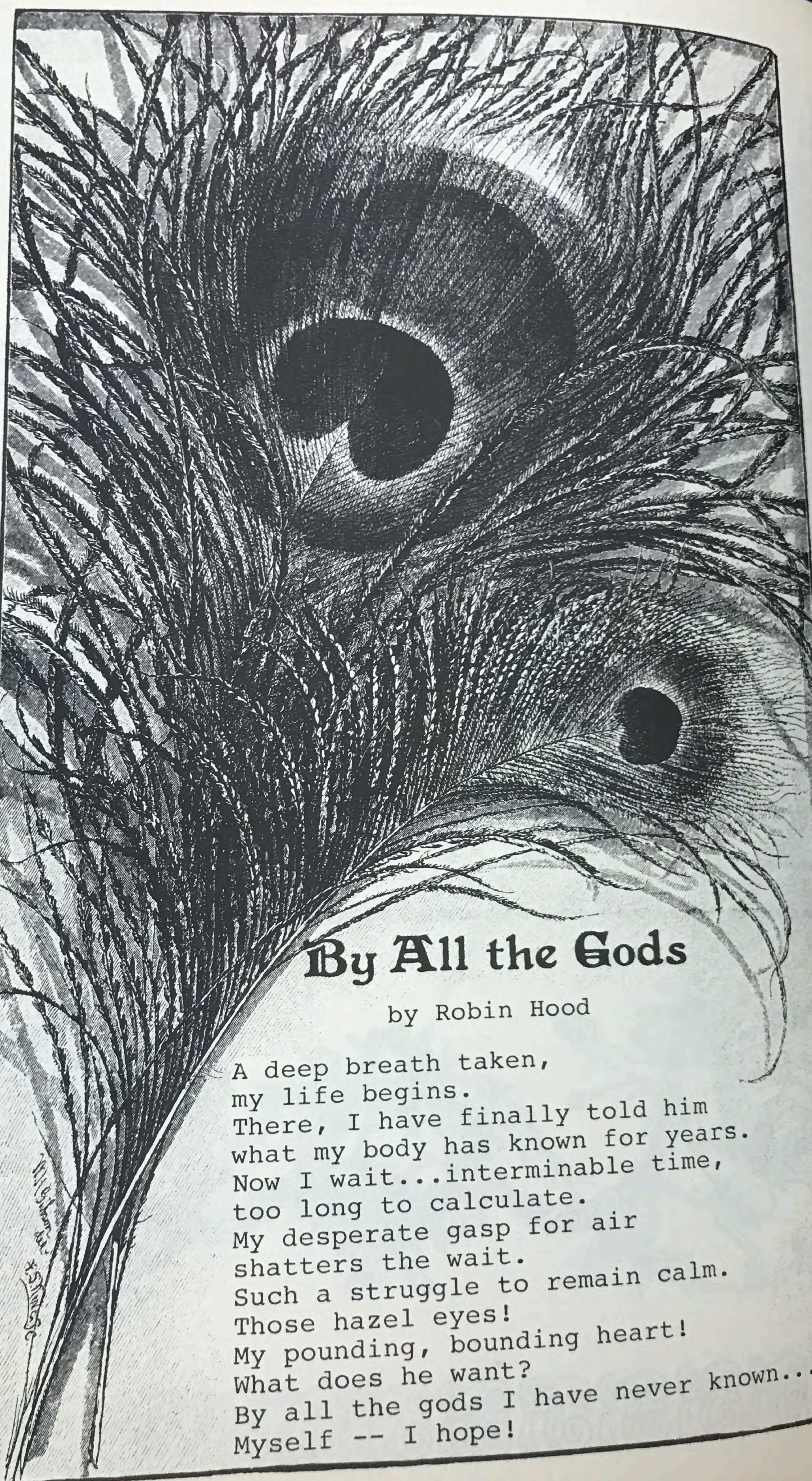


Leonard McCoy, passing by in the corridor outside the Deck Five head, stopped in mid-stride as he heard uncontrollable laughter coming through the closed doors. It sounded, he thought, for all the worlds like a hysterical James T. Kirk. But what in the blue blazes could Jim possibly find so hilarious in the indecipherable scrawls on the Deck Five head walls?

Ah, but Hell, what did he know? He was just an old country doctor. No-body ever told him anything.

Shaking his head, McCoy moved on.



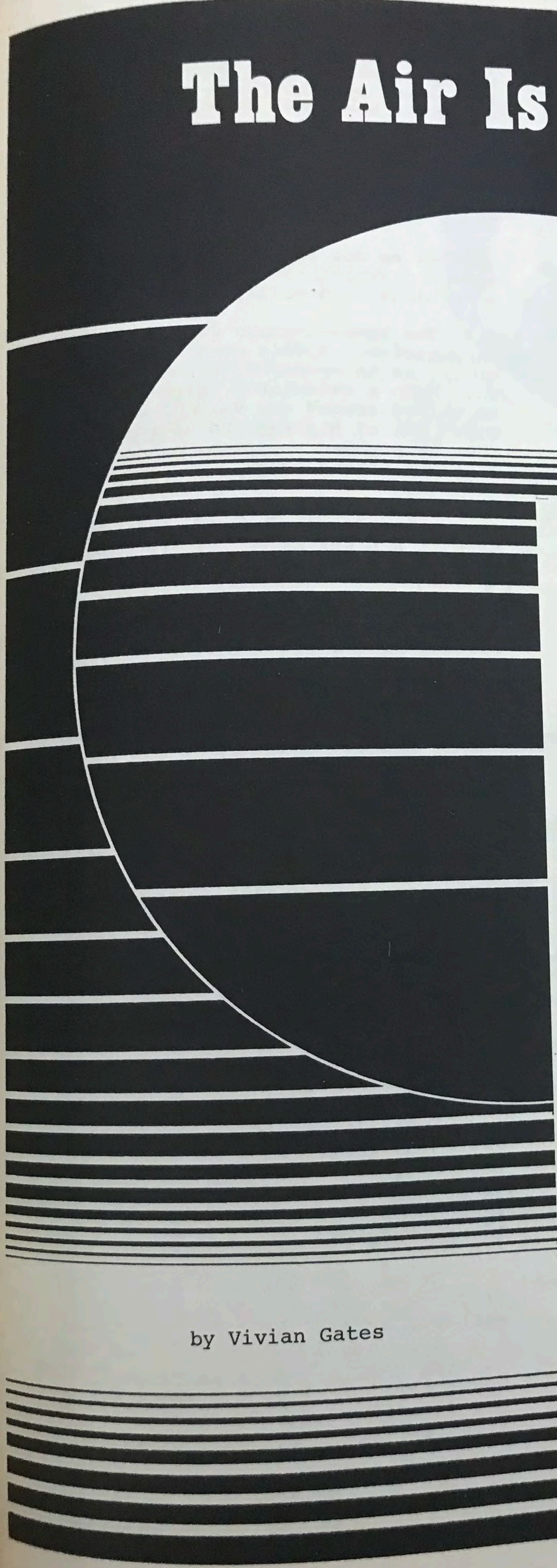


By All the Gods

by Robin Hood

A deep breath taken,
my life begins.
There, I have finally told him
what my body has known for years.
Now I wait...interminable time,
too long to calculate.
My desperate gasp for air
shatters the wait.
Such a struggle to remain calm.
Those hazel eyes!
My pounding, bounding heart!
What does he want?
By all the gods I have never known...
Myself -- I hope!

The Air Is the Air



He woke up in a cell. It was a clean, empty, plastic room. What made it a cell was the two Klingon guards at the door. Spock closed his eyes immediately and feigned unconsciousness. He reached out with his mind, cautiously. The body behind his, also sprawled on the floor--he knew it was Captain Kirk. He sensed no other Human minds. No native minds, either. Only the rawness of open, unguarded minds, too far away to read or affect, and definitely Klingon.

He began to use his other senses. There were low voices. His universal translator was working, then. He could understand the occasional word he could hear. The voices were useful in other ways. They bounced off the walls. A small room. No covering on the floor.

It was cold, too. He was naked. From the amount of heat radiating from behind him, so was Kirk. He was not hurt. Was the Captain? He flared his nostrils slightly but could not detect the scent of Human blood.

It was time to take a small risk. Spock looked out through slitted eyes. He faced the only door, and there was a guard standing in front of it, a large, heavily muscled male with a dour expression. It was not so easy to see the other guard, but he was sitting in a chair--definitely a smaller man--smiling and tugging one side of his long mustache as he stared at the prisoners.

"I wish the Federation pigs would wake up. There's no challenge to this duty," grumbled the large one.

The other tipped his chair back and glanced up with a cheerful sneer. "Ah, Bodar! Bored? You want these spies awake? You know the stun will not wear off for at least a half hour. You have no patience. You are not suited for this job."

"No patience with you, either, you horny nose-drip."

by Vivian Gates

"There HAS been an improvement now that the lab has taken away their clothing, don't you think?"

"They don't stink as much now. So what. All Feds stink. And now we have to look at their ugliness."

"I've seen worse. Paid to see worse." The contemplative look on the handsome, small face intensified. "Put their heads to the floor and who'd notice how ugly they are?"

"Kova, you think about screwing too much," Bodar complained again, scratching his beard but still keeping both eyes on the sprawled bodies. "Besides. A Human and a Vulcan. Pah!"

"Human males, Bodar, are great fun. They keep themselves mostly to women, you know, so they don't know soldier's ways. They scream and fight and it is as good as Orion whores!"

"Ha! You say. But Vulcans. I have done a Vulcan. They kneel down when you order but they are like rocks. It is like putting your stick in slime."

"Have you really? A Vulcan?" Kova asked, obviously intrigued.

"They gave the merchant citizens to the soldiers when we took Adilas. Enough for the whole regiment's pleasure. Vulcans and Andorians and Adilasians. One of the old Vulcans and a Adilas boy were handed to my war-partner Riban and me. We later traded the Vulcan for a bottle of wine. He was no good."

"No good? One knife dull among many, perhaps. This one looks young. Maybe yours was too old."

"You are thinking of sporting with these?"

"Why not? The commander did say we should try to make their waiting unhappy. Who knows, when the flagship arrives, they may be given over to the troops, for you know how much the ship-captain hates Federation spies. What chance will we have then, among thirty others? The section leaders alone will sport the life out of them!"

Spock saw the one called Bodar rubbing his hands absently, as if soothing an arthritic ache, while his whole face darkened in thought. "I go first," he said at last. "Do we take them asleep?"

"Imagine a Fed waking up to find your stick stabbing his bowels out!" Kova was laughing. "He'd damage your ears with his shriek!"

Bodar laughed, too, but he was shaking his head. "Let's see if we can kick one awake. The Human," he insisted.

"That will not be necessary." The smooth, controlled Vulcan tones

caused both Klingons to drop into a defensive crouch. The Vulcan was not only conscious, but sitting up.

"Ah! Worm!" From the awkward position half off his chair, a pleased Kova stood up, stretched, passed his weapon to Bodar and casually walked over. He stood, looming over the seated Vulcan and grinned.

"Ah, worm!" he repeated. "My worm! Bodar wants the soft-gutted Human and that makes you mine to fuck!"

If he was expecting a fearful response, he was disappointed. "It is Bodar's loss," the Vulcan said coldly.

The Vulcan seemed unperturbed, even cooperative. Kova's eyes narrowed speculatively as he wondered what the alien was up to. With a calculated, easy-hipped swagger he walked around the Vulcan, kicking the Human out of his way and up against the wall. Then he prodded the thin, hairy Vulcan thigh with his booted toe.

"You think you are worth my time?" Kova grinned. It drew his mustache up and made it a black frame for his gleaming white teeth.

"If you are made as Human or Vulcan males, it may be worth your time." Spock looked up, meeting Kova's eyes, allowing some challenge to show in them. "I have mated with males. If you wish an unwilling partner, I will be as he described," Spock indicated Bodar, "submissive and passively uncooperative. We do not fight. However, if you wish a challenge," Spock's eyes dropped to the floor as if he were embarrassed. His voice dropped to a whisper, "try and see if you can make me cry out-- with pleasure. No one ever has," he added. There was just the right amount of braggadocio and confidence in Spock's voice. The Klingon never knew how completely he was manipulated.

"Vulcan! Do you think I can't?" Laughing, the Klingon reached down for a handful of black hair. He jerked Spock's head up, forcing the prisoner to look at him.

"Unknown," answered the Vulcan. "I have never joined with a Klingon." He used his trump card. "Are they better than Humans?"

Kova laughed again and hauled Spock to his feet, then shoved Spock face first against the wall. The lax body of Captain Kirk fell across Spock's feet as the Klingon tugged him into position. "Let's see what you have to offer, Vulcan!"

He studied the nude body in front of him. Black hair was scattered in sparse, serpentine patterns across the bony Vulcan back. The buns were small and white, over legs dark with curling hair. Kova poked a stiff finger here and there, finally down the crack of the ass and into the anus. He pulled it out with a jerk and demanded, "Turn around, Fed scum."

Spock did, slowly, face impassive.

"You look better from the front. But not



much," taunted the Klingon. He prodded here, too, the flat, oblong paps first, and then the ribs and pubic hair. Last, he reached out quickly and scooped up the soft Vulcan cock. "This is a baby's toy! Do you expect to please with this thin blade? No wonder no one has made you scream with pleasure!" He squeezed it, laughing, then gave several ungentle yanks. "Well, maybe I could find some use for it. I could cut it off and have a whip handle made of it. I saw that done once." Out of the corner of his eye, he was checking to see if Spock would react. When he didn't, Kova gave one final, lewd, fingering tug and then reached under to thump the small balls.

He tired of that. "Turn," he demanded, "bend over." Instant compliance. Kova flashed his grin at Bodar and then leisurely reached down and shoved his finger up into Spock again, chuckling at the reflexive twitch of flesh that Spock did not quite suppress. "What? From my finger?" jeered Kova. Spock was silent and motionless.

Kova took his hand back and stood, staring down at the submissive, still bent-over Vulcan.

"I told you. They are not any fun," Bodar said.

Kova made a rude gesture. "From behind, I think," he said with mock deliberation. His hand was at his waist, unfastening the flap of cloth that was both quilted codpiece and fly. He remained dressed, but his cock sprang free.

Kova caressed his own part lovingly, the natural lubrication automatically distributed by the action. The walnut brown organ stood hard and tall. Yet he was content to play with it idly, while he stared at the Vulcan, who was still motionless in the awkward position.

"On your knees," the Klingon at last demanded, and as the Vulcan complied, Kova knelt behind him. With no gentleness at all he spread the paper white cheeks, snubbed his cock against the wrinkled entrance and gave a mighty shove.

As Spock had forced himself to be completely relaxed, the action left the Klingon off balance but sheathed to the hilt. Kova grunted and recovered his balance but said nothing. He had more pressing business. He began to fuck enthusiastically. It did not matter to him that Spock was not really participating. At that point, Kova was interested in nothing but his own pleasure.

He found a great deal of pleasure, if judgment could be made from the throaty gasps he generated. His mustache was wet from his

own breath, his face contorted into a fierce grimace. It was an extended pleasure. Often the Klingon seemed near his release, but then he would groan, change position or pace, and drive on again.

It became too much for Bodar. After a hasty check on the still unconscious Human, he interrupted Kova by placing a heavy hand on his shoulder, and pulling him out of the Vulcan.

Kova's glance was pure ire. "You can't have him!" he snarled.

"Don't want the Vulcan scum," Bodar replied, giving a jerk to Kova's pants, pulling them down to the other's knees. "You have him, I'll have--you!" As he spoke, he pulled his own cock out, kneading it energetically. He gave it a few fast jerks, spread some spit on it and pushed it towards his partner's body. "Get on with what you were doing," Bodar encouraged. Wordlessly, Kova did so, holding still as Bodar shoved into him.

Then they were moving. Bodar, Kova, even Spock, who braced himself against the double weight with Vulcan strength, and then pressed back into the thrusting.

Kova was sweating now, gnawing wetly on the Vulcan back and gasping and fucking and



being fucked and finally yelling out his victory and collapsing on the bony Vulcan back.

Spock was braced solidly, and Bodar was not through yet. Caught between them, Kova lay loosely, accepting Bodar's banging thrusts. Wherever he still touched the Vulcan he was hot and sweating. He held onto him for support, breathing with the rhythm of Bodar's strokes. He felt light-headed, disoriented. Something was trying to get his attention.... He finally decided that it was his cock, limply riding in the firey crack of the Vulcan's ass. It was getting stiff again. He fought against Bodar's heavy stroking, trying to pull back enough to aim himself into the Vulcan ass again.

This seemed to excite Bodar, who growled and wrestled Kova back into place. He finished then, in a flurry of rapid-fire strokes and a gargled cry.

Bodar slipped to the floor, Kova found himself not as interested in another round as he had thought and sprawled down, too. It was heady relief just to get away from the hot Vulcan. He remembered his duty, though, and was turning towards him just as a spike-fingered hand closed on his shoulder....

Spock, still kneeling beside the two he had just neck-pinned, turned, seeking his Captain, to waken him, take these uniforms and escape. He froze. The Captain was conscious, and the expression on his face.... Spock made no explanation, merely bending over the bodies and beginning to undress them.

Kova's clothes would be tight on Kirk, short on Spock. Spock considered and then set them aside for himself, taking Bodar's for Kirk. He passed them, along with Bodar's weapon, to his Captain. Kirk mechanically began to dress, but his attention was centered on Spock. Finally he shook his head, as if trying to clear it.

They knew what they had to do next: escape and get to the shielded shelter that was their base--if it were still a secret. Finding Klingons on this primitive planet was a surprise. The Federation had thought it was dealing only with transmission pirates; but if it were the Klingons who were intercepting and altering Federation signals, the implications were sinister.

How many Klingon soldiers were here? What level of technology did they bring with them? Did they have the cooperation of the native government? Kirk and Spock had no answers, only some vital knowledge to protect and pass on. The only safe place for them to be was the shielded cellar.

They dressed hastily, knowing that the uniforms would be an effective disguise only at a distance, but unable to go naked among the rather conservative natives.

Kirk recovered enough to take command, motioning for Spock to flatten himself against the wall as he cautiously approached the door. It yielded to pressure, and no one was in the hallway. Silent as mist they stole along the corridors, thankful

that it was a native building, not designed to be a prison. It had too many doors for proper security. They were out one and down the nearest alley within minutes.

Spock recognized the locale almost immediately. He held up two fingers for two kilometers, then pointed north. Kirk nodded to show he understood. Far glimpses of the brighter colors of the main streets and snippets of noise kept pace with the fleeing men as they ran through the alleys. At last they heard behind them what they did not want to hear--guttural shouts in Klingonese. In mutual accord they began to run faster, until they were within several blocks of their goal. And then they could not travel by alley. They had to cross an open square.

They paused to look for Klingons, to catch their breath. Kirk pulled his stolen shirt off and put it on inside out, and Spock, wordlessly observing, did the same. Walking naturally, they began to traverse the perimeter of the square. It was a long walk, and every time a puzzled merchant observed them, every time they were jostled by the crowd, they expected to be accosted.

It didn't happen. Perhaps if Kirk had been alone he would have given in and run the last few yards. With Spock so stoically calm beside him, he forced himself to a steady pace, even as they passed safely into the building, went down two flights of crude wooden stairs and through the hidden panel.

Inside the room, a slice of the Federation existed, a contrast to the native culture that was very obvious. Clear, even lighting, comfortable furniture designed for Human/Vulcan anatomy, beds that were more than a pallet on the floor, food and water that could be consumed without testing. Kirk sighed his huge relief and quickly went to the chest that held their clothing. He stripped off the scratchy Klingon cloth gratefully. But he did it with his back to the room and his shoulders stiff.

Jim had put on his uniform. They had been wearing light, informal civilian clothing when here before, and it was four days until pick-up. But Jim had put on his uniform. The significance was not lost on Spock, and he also put on his uniform.

The Captain had put tea and coffee on the table and was seated. He did not look directly at Spock when he sat down, but he asked, "Are you all right? Not hurt?"

"I am not hurt." Spock replied, gazing at his Captain with outward calm. He could see the ripple along Kirk's neck as the Human swallowed, hard. Yet a long minute passed and Kirk seemed to have nothing to say.

Spock knew what was on his mind. He

had known for two years that this time would come. He had not known that his sexual preference for men would be so graphically demonstrated to Jim Kirk. He had always known that it would be difficult for the Captain to accept.

The Vulcan fought down a warmth at the thought. It was Kirk who most attracted him, of all the men he had ever met. Yet he knew, too, that Jim Kirk was not for him. The man's heterosexuality was legend. Spock could accept that fact, had accepted it long ago. But his body had been aroused and denied only an hour ago, and it yearned. He controlled it.

A factual report, he decided, would be most acceptable to Kirk. Without preamble, he began. "Captain, when I became aware... conscious, in the cell, I heard our guards discussing the...sexual use of our bodies. Escape was of primary importance. I could not overpower them both, and you were unconscious. I determined that the sexual contact they desired would allow me to control the situation. Through the physical contact, I was able to gain access to the mind of the one who touched me. I projected his sensations to the other guard. He was receptive to the idea of participation and abandoned his post. When both were sexually expended, I was able to render them unconscious with the neck pinch."

"Which explains why I woke up to see you..." Kirk cleared his throat awkwardly, "with both of them." He couldn't say it: Fucking with both of them.

"Affirmative. I regret that it caused you distress," Spock replied.

Kirk opened his mouth, closed it, then shrugged and said honestly, "It was a surprise, all right."

It is the time to tell him, thought Spock, resolutely. "Were you aware..." he stopped and met Kirk's asking eyes. It was hard to continue, but he forced himself. "...that I am bisexual?" The words floated in the silence surrounding them.

"No. I didn't know that," Jim Kirk answered, his voice almost normal.

"I do not wish you to be concerned about psychological or physical damage because of a same sex union. There was none."

"You enjoyed it?" There was a trace of accusation in the Human's voice.

"Negative. I...no. Because of the telepathic aspect of what I was attempting, I did experience some pleasure of a transitory nature. It was the Klingon's pleasure, not mine." Spock was speaking about his own sexuality with the same rational objectivity he used for any subject that interested him.

Confused, exhausted, Kirk took a deep gulp of his now cool coffee. "I never suspected." Here he was, having a discussion of...about sex, with Spock. Bisexual? He remembered the last conversation he'd had with Spock about sex, about

two years ago, Spock in pon farr and twisting and sweating through an agonized explanation. Bisexual. Was that why T'Pring....

Spock interrupted his thoughts. "I have felt that, as my Captain, and my friend, you should know of it. I did not know how to introduce the subject." He warmed his hands on the stoneware of his cup, turning it slowly as he continued. "I was not certain of your personal opinions. If you feel this information reduces my effectiveness as an officer under your command, I will make arrangements for a transfer."

"You're talking nonsense!" Kirk frowned, "Do you really think I care about my crew's sexual preferences? That I'd get rid of somebody because of it?" He seemed shocked that Spock would consider him prejudiced.

"I am not speaking nonsense. I do not attribute to you those negative characteristics. I postulate a future occurrence, where my own preferences become known and, because of our friendship, rumor will project a similar taste to you."

"Me?" Kirk laughed. "With my reputation, another rumor or two won't have much affect!"

"Perhaps not. I have not found those who have congress with their own sex to be universally accepted."

At Spock's cryptic reference, Kirk sent a concerned glance. "Does anybody on the ship know?"

"Dr. McCoy." Spock did not mention the effect of a certain strain of Human bacteria on his digestive tract, and the explanation he had been forced to give the medical officer. McCoy had been professional about the incident, asking for no intimate details and refraining from teasing. But he had told Spock at the time, that he felt the Captain should be informed.

And now, Spock realized, he should report to McCoy for a physical because of the unknown medical implications of Klingon material in his system. He was not looking forward to it.

"Did McCoy..." Kirk began testily.

"No. Dr. McCoy is quite...neutral in his expressed opinions on the subject."

"Oh. Good." Kirk finished his second cup of coffee and said with feigned casualness, "We'll be cooped up here four days waiting for pickup. Can't go out at all--too risky...."

"Do you need assurances as to my conduct?" The Vulcan voice was a trifle too cold.

"I didn't say that!" Kirk was both hasty in his denial and outraged that he had been misinterpreted. "I have NEVER doubted your integrity!"

Only my motives?, thought Spock: Do you suspect? Suspect how much I feel, how much I want from you? It was easy when you did not know. I could be with you and be content with that. Now your eyes will meet mine and there will always be a question in them.

His thoughts touched his expression with sadness. "My apologies, Captain, for doubting yours," he said softly.

Kirk's understanding flooded his face and suddenly it was all right between them again. "Chess?", he offered.

Chess. Their universal panacea for troubled times. Spock, who would rather have had the security of work, did not dare risk his Captain's frame of mind, and so went and got the board without further words. After all, he considered, Kirk did play a good game of chess. He was distracted from thoughts of the man behind the moves. He became so absorbed in the game that when Kirk spoke again, it was startlingly intrusive.

"I'm curious," Kirk said, diffidently.

Spock looked up, calm on the exterior, wary inside.

"Been to the Castle Mile?" He named a notorious males-only club on Argelius.

"No." Spock, who never frequented any of the bars and bath houses of any planet, did not elaborate.

"Pity. I've always wondered if the stories were even half true."

"I understand they are not," Spock replied carefully.

Kirk didn't ask his source of information. But it did get his thoughts turned to what sort of relationships Spock would have. Who and what and where. He decided to risk another question.

"Are you steady, with anyone?" Then he qualified it with, "I don't want to make any mistakes, some faux pas, with...well...."

"I understand. I am not involved sexually with any member of the Enterprise crew, past or present," he said firmly. "It is not advocated in regulations. Specifically, Subsection 84 B, dealing with chain of command and violations of the co-service compact...."

"Right," Kirk interrupted with a smile. He understood. He didn't have sexual relationships with crewmembers, either. He turned his attention to the game--for awhile. He found that his mind kept returning to the idea of Spock's sexuality. There was a certain sophistication connected with bisexuality. Spock, by association, took on a slightly different stature in his mind. That took some mental adjustment on Kirk's part. With his reputation as a lover, he had always felt a small sense of superiority over Spock in that department. It was like a pride, and it stung a little as he came to

terms with it. The tortoise catches up with the hare, he thought, with a mental smile. Your First Officer could make love to, satisfy anyone, man or woman. You're only in half the race, Jim Kirk. Yet he didn't feel inadequate.

Spock seemed to be frowning. "Penny for 'em," Kirk offered casually.

"I regret that I could see no other method than telepathic suggestion to effect our escape," he said as he looked up.

The sexual part isn't even what's bothering him the most, Kirk realized, with a bit of a shock. It was using his mind on the Klingons!

"Look at it this way. We got out of a bad situation and nobody got killed. We have absolute proof of Klingon activity--we have the uniforms. And we're safe here. We've done worse things for fewer results!"

"I am not sure that that is a comfort," Spock said dryly.

"All we've got," Kirk pointed out, with a wave of the pawn in his hand. "Wishing otherwise is useless."

That was true. Yet, Spock thought, I wish you had not seen me intimate with them.

Had there been another way? Had he let his body choose for him? To act without true consideration was abhorrent to any Vulcan. Had he allowed the Klingons more use of his body than circumstances demanded?

He could not deny that he drew pleasure from a male member put into him, from the mating and the passion flowing from another mind. The Klingon had been crude in technique and primitive in his lust. But it had been so long--eight months, two days--since Spock had had a sexual encounter, longer than that since he had taken the dominating role and placed himself into a partner's willing flesh. Had he chosen hedonistically?

He reigned his mind in firmly. It made no difference now and there was danger in considering sexual matters in the presence of James Kirk. If even once, by accident, his desire showed in his eyes, his friendship with this Human would be in jeopardy. He would not risk it. Therefore, he schooled his mind to the game, to such effect that he won it at last.

Denying Kirk a rematch, he began on his work instead, and when all the reports were gem-perfect and work no longer an option, he slept. Four days passed; he became adroit at leading conversations to Kirk's interests, at feeding basically one-sided conversations. He did not allow them to stray back to the subject of sexuality. Instead, they discussed the reorganization of ship's services, the shape the Enterprise had been in when they had left her in drydock, and Scotty's new bagpipes.

Kirk had mumbled about "how the admiral had managed to talk us into this damned

mission!" and Spock had refrained from pointing out that Starfleet had had no trouble at all recruiting Kirk for this "adventure". It was all very much as usual between them. Yet Spock sensed a small change, and several times he sensed Kirk staring at him when Spock was turned away.

Both were definitely relieved when their pickup ship arrived. They were assigned a room to share on the shuttle, but neither of them spent much time there. Four days in one small room made larger rooms and diversity attractive even to Spock. Spock had the use of the ship's science computer. Kirk became involved in a flirtation with one of the ship's officers.

They finally reached Starbase 8 and were debriefed, and returned to the Enterprise. Scotty reported all repairs and changes complete. They were ready to go. In a flurry of activity the Captain sent them towards Alpha Drona, and if there were more haste than the orders called for, no one noticed it. Perhaps no one noticed the energy the Captain put into his work during the next few weeks. At least two people were aware that the Captain's schedule involved little association with the First Officer outside of duty shifts.

Spock reacted to the neglect by withdrawing into his work. In his quiet research, he practiced patience. He was not really hurt by the change. He was willing to give Jim Kirk all the time he needed to come to terms, to adjust. It might have been easier if Spock had confessed to an on-board lover. Then the relationship with Kirk might have been reinforced as friendship only, and he might have been able to relax.

Knowing his Captain, he had enough confidence in Kirk's character to be satisfied that, when Jim Kirk found a comfortable adjustment, he would communicate to Spock the role he expected Spock to play. And Spock, who knew exactly how important Jim Kirk was to him, would take up that role and play it, without objection.

The ship's Doctor, on the other hand, watched the Captain ignore the First Officer, and seethed. McCoy was also aware of the shifting scales, and having both more and less faith in Human nature than Spock, there came a day when he showed up at Kirk's door with two glasses and a tall, black bottle.

Jim, curious, welcomed the Doctor and settled him on one side of the small table that graced the Captain's quarters. The table that seldom saw any use other than to hold the chess board. Perhaps it was that which gave Kirk a premonition of what was on the Doctor's mind. At any rate, he was not surprised when McCoy began straightforwardly.

"I hear Spock finally told you," McCoy said with a sip of the fine wine Kirk had poured out.

"You could have heard that only from Spock," the Captain pointed out from over his glass.

"True." The Doctor studied Kirk's face

for signs of stress and waited for further reaction from Kirk.

"Well?" Kirk prodded, too canny to let the Doctor stall this early in the conversation. Bones had something on his mind. Better to kick it around now.

"Bother you?" McCoy asked, casually.

"Oh, for God's sake, Bones!" Kirk exploded.

"Bothers you." McCoy said it with a nod, a trifle too self-congratulatory.

"As a matter of fact, no. Spock and I talked it out rather completely. It doesn't bother me."

"Which is why you've hardly spoken to him in weeks."

"We've been busy, Doctor. Or maybe you haven't noticed, down in Sickbay." Kirk was elegantly sarcastic.

"Busy? I suppose. Busy ignoring the truth." McCoy seemed to be giving full attention to his drink.

"What the...what's that supposed to mean?" Kirk demanded irately.

"If Spock had been stabbed, you'd have been on my case continually, at his side every minute, until I'd have to chase you out. Seeing as how he was only raped, you don't want to hear about it."

"He wasn't...." Kirk's voice faded into silence.

"You don't know, do you?" the Doctor asked.

"Raped?" Kirk repeated.

"Got any other word for a forced sexual act? I doubt Spock," he emphasized, "did it for the S&M thrill of it all. In fact, I suspect he did it partly to keep a fat Klingon cock out of your own virgin ass." His words were striking home--Kirk was wide-eyed and still, his glass forgotten in his hand.

"He's...okay?" Kirk asked at last.

McCoy snorted. That was better. "He's all right. I'm just pointing out," he said, more gently, "that you've been avoiding the incident mentally--and Spock, physically. Gave you a shock, waking up to see him under a Klingon?"

"Under two," Kirk said grimly.

"Two?" McCoy's eyebrow flicked up.

"The big Klingon fucking the little one, and the little one fucking Spock. Regular daisy chain."

"And Spock?"

"I couldn't see. He neck-pinned them practically the minute they were done."

"Um." McCoy said thoughtfully. Then he added, "Your ass is virgin, isn't it?"

Kirk shot him a none-of-your-business look, but answered, "Yes."

"Thought so. Too bad."

"Too bad?" Kirk whipped his words out suspiciously.

"You and Spock have a good friendship. Friendships make a good basis for a sexual relationship." The Doctor didn't make his suggestion directly, going carefully.

"Spock doesn't want me!" Kirk said confidently.

"Don't be so damned sure. Spock doesn't know what he wants. Vulcan, Human, male, female. Or rather, I think he knows exactly what he wants. A certain kind of acceptance. And when he finds it, he'll take it, whatever form it comes in. But you can bet your golden nacelles, he's thought about you and him."

"Look, he doesn't want me. Besides, he said he's never screwed anybody on the ship. He's just like me: he keeps his private life off it."

"How much of that is happenstance? You think he'd turn you down? You, his best friend, because of that?" McCoy was still addressing his remarks to the table and the glass, but he could see Kirk's face reflected in the liquid, a white, open-mouthed, wavering circle.

"It's against regs, anyway," Kirk was adding.

"Sure, and you know how well they're observed. I heard you, yourself, say that you'd make a play for that Admiral--what's her name, Lori something--if you ever got grounded for some reason. That would be a case of two people with probably conflicting interests, getting together. You have no trouble thinking of that!"

"That's different!" Kirk protested.

"Isn't," countered the Doctor gruffly. "You'd buck the regs. But not for Spock."

"Damn it, Bones, I'm not built that way! I can't! I can't! Not with a man, Bones. Not even with Spock!"

"Sit down." McCoy advised.

Kirk seemed surprised to find himself half out of his chair. He sat.

"Y'see, this is the point," McCoy said, topping off the glasses. "Now you can confront Spock with it, or let it ride. You can fall into a relationship with Spock that's pretty much the same as you've always had, and that's fine. But you do it with your eyes open. Spock, and his friendship--it's not something you can just throw away. I know how much you've both put into your

friendship. Spock especially. You ever think of what he's had to do, how he's had to change, just to be your friend? Salvage what you can. If you can." He sighed into his glass, watching his breath make ripples in the garnet liquid and wondering if his words would affect Kirk even as much as his breath moved the wine.

He made up his mind. "Spock has so much love to give, Jim," McCoy whispered.

"You can say that?" Kirk asked, surprised.

"If you can't see it, you're a bigger damned fool than you've given me to believe!" McCoy snapped.

"You're telling me about Spock?" Kirk demanded.

"I'm telling you about you," countered McCoy. "I'm saying that if you choose wrong, you don't get a second chance. But if you know you can't love Spock that way, don't drag it out. Don't drag out the hope he might have. Give him a chance for love somewhere else. He needs it."

"I understand, Bones." Kirk was tired. Weeks of pressure, and the wine dragged at his eyes. He was tired of having McCoy here. "I really do," he said, sincerely.

"Good." There was a little wine left in the bottom of his glass. McCoy drank it. "Don't make mistakes the other way, either. No good mistaking one kind of love for another. Thinking you can make a go of it on wishing it were so. I've done that. My wife was a tiger and I tried to make her into a housecat. It...didn't work. Well,...we are what we are."

"The air is the air'," Kirk quoted softly.

"There's that, too," McCoy agreed, referring to pon farr. He saw that Jim followed the thought. "That, too," he repeated, almost to himself. Then, with a half-groan, he abruptly stood. "I've had my say. I...aw, Jim!" He shook his head, wordlessly.

Kirk stood, too, and followed the slumping Doctor to the door. "You want the bottle?"

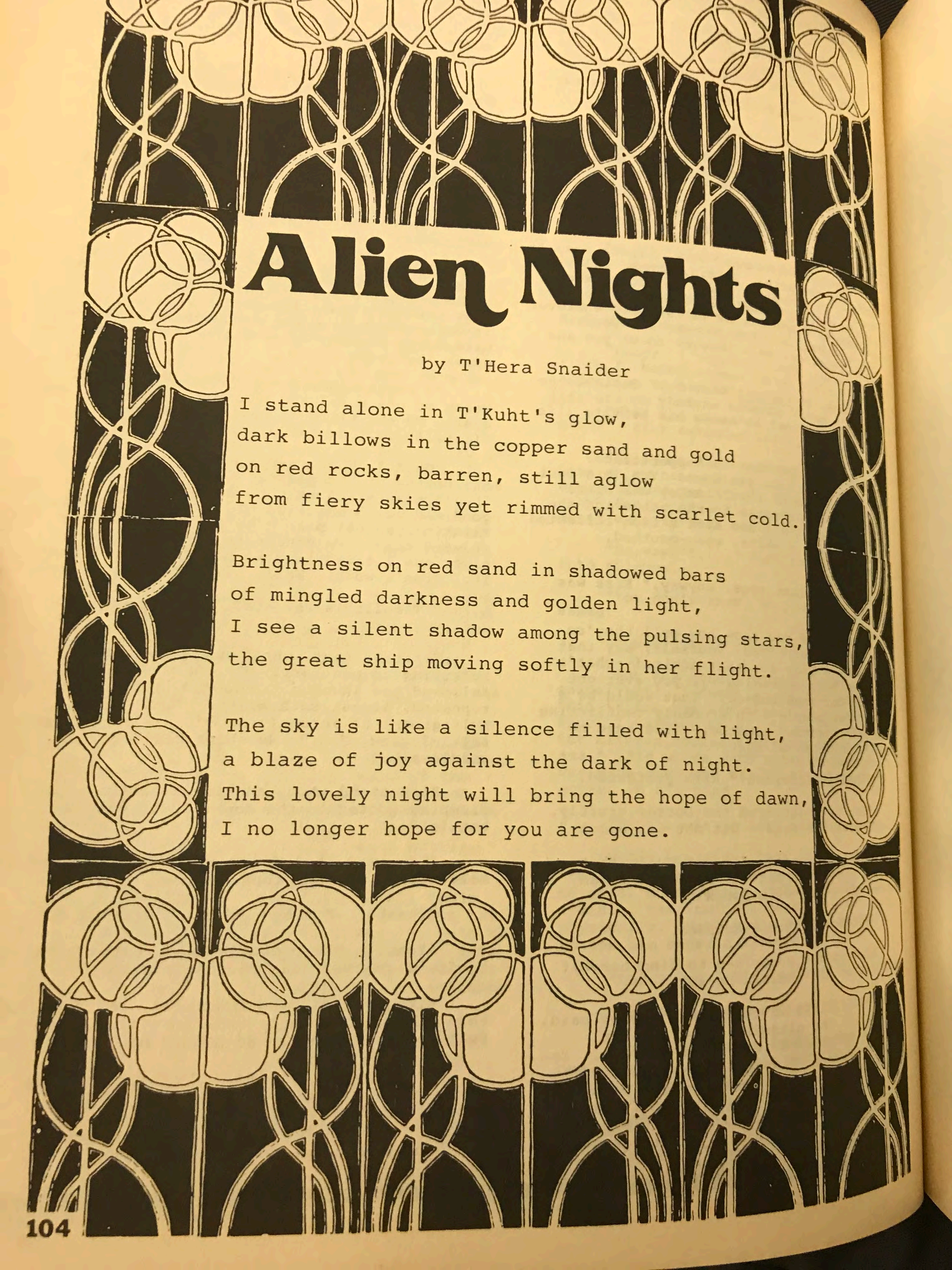
"You keep it," McCoy advised. You need it more than I do, his tone implied.

"Thanks. For everything," Kirk said.

"Yeah." The Doctor's hand rested briefly on Jim's shoulder and then he was gone.

Kirk went back to the table. He sat, and then hefted the bottle experimentally. Half full--or half empty. He poured his glass full.

"The air is the air'," he said to the empty room, and drained his glass. "Oh, Spock!" He sighed, and said again, "Oh, Spock." As if pulled by a dozen gravities, his head went down into his arms and he cried.



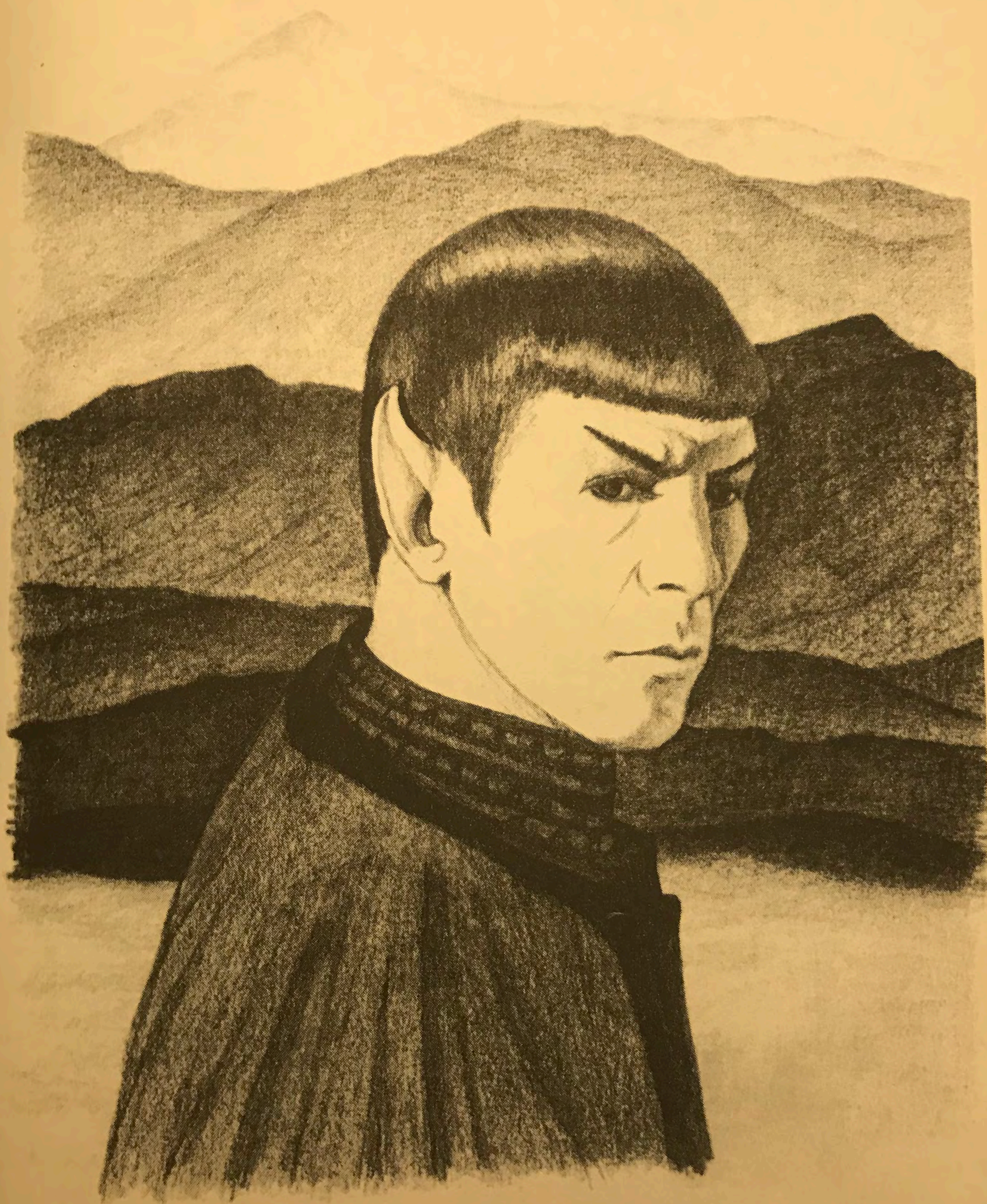
Alien Nights

by T'Hera Snaider


I stand alone in T'Kuht's glow,
dark billows in the copper sand and gold
on red rocks, barren, still aglow
from fiery skies yet rimmed with scarlet cold.

Brightness on red sand in shadowed bars
of mingled darkness and golden light,
I see a silent shadow among the pulsing stars,
the great ship moving softly in her flight.

The sky is like a silence filled with light,
a blaze of joy against the dark of night.
This lovely night will bring the hope of dawn,
I no longer hope for you are gone.







HOME COMING

by Setheria Dragon

This vignette is an epilogue to STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE, and echoes the exalted passion of the Sickbay scene and the V'ger transfiguration. Setheria Dragon is a talented professional artist who presently lives in Illinois. When her professional commitments allow, she both illustrates and writes for K/S zines. She is also a fantasy and science fiction artist whose work has appeared at SF conventions. Some beautiful examples of her ink and pencil work appear elsewhere in ALIEN BROTHERS.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Kirk gazed about the Bridge. The ENTERPRISE was now in deep space, having once again cleared Earth's solar system. V'Ger was no longer a threat. Everyone seemed, well, a bit euphoric; Kirk felt it too. The last three days had been... overwhelming, to say the least.

Kirk surveyed his Bridge crew. They all had, each in his or her own manner, triumphed in personal ways Kirk could only guess at--all in these last 72 hours. As for himself, if he hadn't exactly triumphed, he'd sure as Hell come to grips with certain aspects of his own psyche. When the shake-down was over, perhaps he could even go back to his desk job. Kirk fought back the instant rebellion that the thought created. In reflex, he glanced around toward the science station and frowned: Where was Spock? An as yet nameless lieutenant sat at the science station.

Ever since Spock had announced 24 hours ago that he would not be returning to Vulcan, Kirk had wanted nothing more than just to talk to his lost and found friend. Perhaps Spock had gone to an early dinner. Bones had already begun harrassing Spock about being underweight. Kirk stifled a moment of envy.

Kirk rose from the command chair.
"Uhura."

"Sir?"

"See if you can locate Spock--without disturbing him." After all, thought Kirk, Spock could be meditating. He leaned against the rail near communications and idly watched the main viewscreen. He would never tire of the vista.

"Sir, Mister...Commander Spock is in the observation room on Engineering Deck."

With a quick nod and smile of thanks, Kirk stepped lightly to the turbolift.

The observation rooms on Engineering Deck, more cubicles than rooms, were a favored meditation area of the ENTERPRISE crew. Kirk rather hoped that the privacy light wouldn't be on. It wasn't. Still, he felt just a bit awkward when the door slid back. It occurred to him as he crossed the threshold that he didn't really know what he wanted to talk to Spock about. A part of him just wanted to be in the Vulcan's presence. But he steadfastly ignored the question that cried out in his mind, and had done so repeatedly over the past three years: why did you leave? He'd resolved not to ask it, now or ever. It was enough that Spock was back. The door slid shut behind him. The tall, dark silhouette before the port didn't move.

Spock's meld with V'ger had had a profound effect on the Vulcan, and Kirk was still concerned about him. McCoy had advised hands off: "Let him sort it out for a time, Jim." But Kirk couldn't get the tears out of his mind, nor the laughter, nor the desperate reaching of that hand clasp. None of those things could be adequately dealt with during the V'ger emergency. Perhaps now....

Moments passed and still Spock did not move. Surely, Vulcan hearing....

Embarrassed and feeling a little silly, Kirk turned to leave.

"Please remain, Jim," intoned Spock, without moving.

"I...I don't want to disturb you," Kirk replied softly, yet moving to stand beside the Vulcan at the observation port.

Spock made no reply, but continued to stare unmoving out the port.

Kirk resisted the compulsion just to look at the Vulcan; the shock of Spock's miraculous appearance still hadn't worn off. Instead, he also fixed his gaze on the slowly changing star-scape. Once again he was overcome with the sense that he actually felt different now that Spock was back, as if a missing piece of himself had been put back in place. And, Kirk reluctantly admitted to himself, it wasn't a by-product of being in active ship command again, as deeply satisfying as that was.

Kirk found it disturbing that Spock was so much a part of himself. Disturbing, yes, yet Kirk admitted to himself that he would not change it even if he could. Not

even to save himself from the pain Spock's absence had caused.

"Nor I."

Kirk turned, startled at the admission. Spock had often been able to perceive his thoughts, but not without touching him except in moments of extreme distress--usually Kirk's.

Amazed and concerned, Kirk repressed his urge to reach out. For, once again, tears were coursing down the slanting cheeks, tiny rivulets that reflected pinpoints of starlight in the dimly lit observation room.

"Spock?" Kirk managed.

"It...it is curiously satisfying."

"What?" Kirk didn't understand.

"Being...here...among my...." Spock was searching for the words he had so long resisted, "...my friends. Among those for whom I...feel so deeply." He turned finally, letting his hands drop from behind his back to his sides.

"Jim, I too feel that sense of completeness, yet, unlike yourself, for the first time." Spock turned back toward the port, his voice barely audible: "In leaving I sought to end my conflict...and my pain."

"Spock," Kirk interrupted. "You don't owe me any explanations. It's enough that you are back."

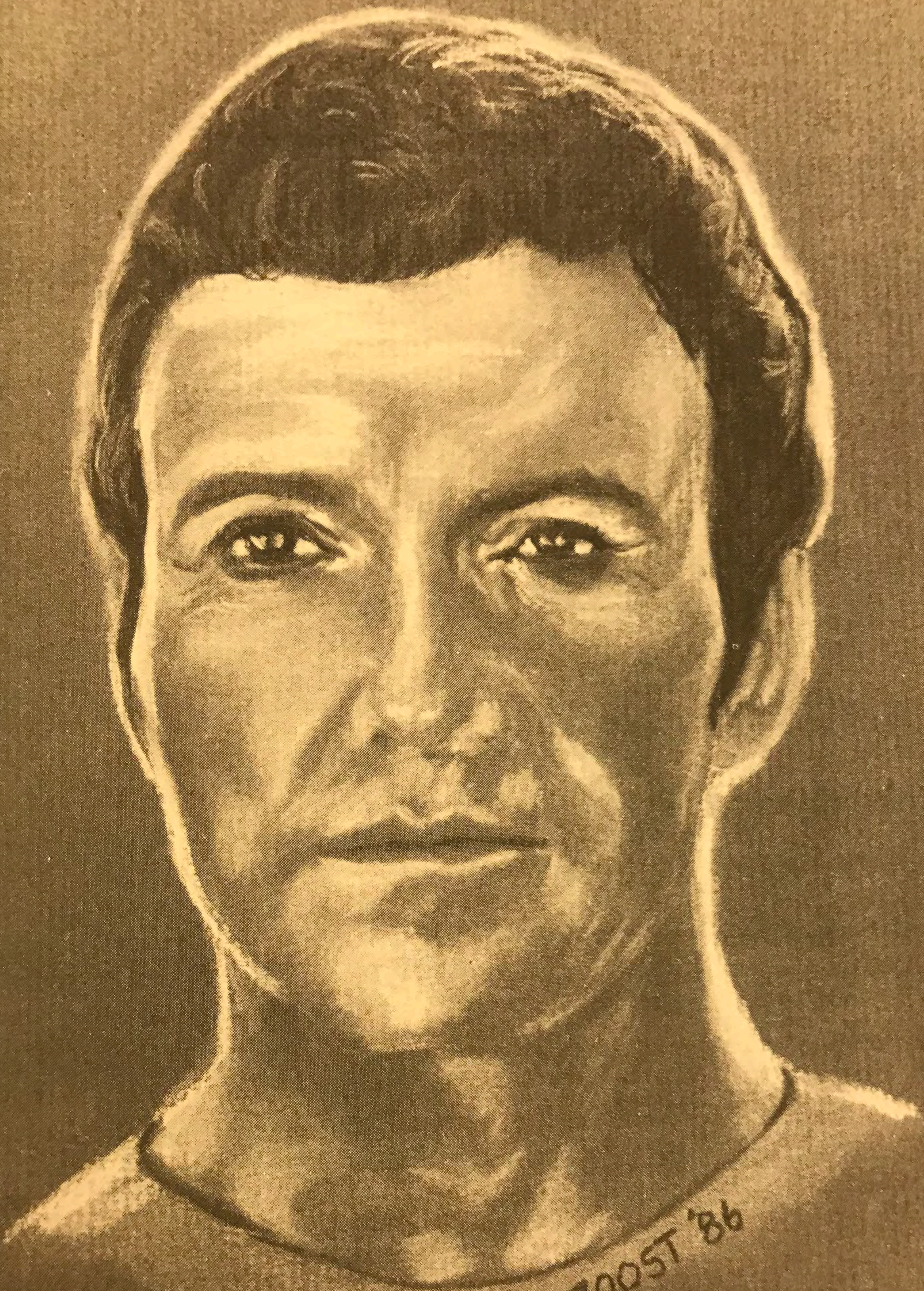
"No. It is not enough," Spock replied simply, and after a breath continued. "Once my decision to go to Gol was made, I could not endure any farewells. I told myself that logically any leavetaking would only be an acknowledgement of the emotions of which I sought to rid myself. I offer this not as an excuse--there can be none for the pain I have caused--it is only an explanation."

Kirk blinked rapidly against the sudden blurring in his eyes.

"I regret...." Spock bowed his head and turned slightly toward his Human friend. "Jim, I hurt you. Hurt myself. Can you forgive?"

"My friend....," Kirk couldn't manage more. This time he did not resist his impulse and firmly grasped Spock's upper arm.

Again Spock bowed his head, nodding slightly in acknowledgement. Kirk's touch was almost a blow in his emotionally open state. Yet Spock resisted the habit of years, allowing the current of Kirk's contact to continue, though the flood of Kirk's raw emotions nearly overwhelmed him. Then amazingly, the control which Spock had always sensed in Kirk asserted itself, and the flow of emotions became less jumbled and chaotic. Kirk's control served them both. Spock was grateful. It cemented his resolve to face, at last, all the issues which had tormented



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him. Now Vulcan control was consciously set aside for the first time in Spock's adult life.

"Jim, I would answer the question you would not have asked."

Kirk understood immediately. He released Spock's arm, sensing instinctively that it would be easier for the Vulcan, perhaps easier for himself as well, without that contact. Part of Kirk wanted to know. Another part, a half-hidden part, curled in on itself, strangely fearful of Spock's reply to his unspoken question.

Spock leaned forward and uncharacteristically grasped the railing in front of the viewport. "I could no longer deny the emotion I felt. I could no longer deny the love I experienced for this ship and the people aboard her. Nor could I deny my feelings for you...nor accept them. Therefore I sought to purge myself of them altogether in the discipline of the Kohlinar."

Kirk leaned close against the railing. "Did it truly hurt you so much to...love?" He peered at Spock.

"Vulcans do not love, not in any manner you would recognize." Spock sighed deeply. "And I was ashamed." He shook his head, straightened, and once again clasped his hands behind his back. "But that alone did not drive me away."

Kirk had to ask it. "Did I...?"

"No." Spock's reply was immediate and firm. "You did nothing to drive me away, Jim."

"Spock, if your feelings of love didn't force you...."

"Love did not drive me away, James. Desire did."

Kirk blinked, open mouthed.

"Desire which mounted beyond enduring; desire I could no longer ignore. Desire that threatened to break all patterns." Spock turned away, struggling to fight back waves of terror without resorting to Vulcan controls.

Kirk could only stare at Spock's back. Words crept without volition from his lips. He wanted, and did not want, to know.

"Desire for what, Spock?" Perhaps Spock referred to acceptance: a place among those people who valued and loved him. Surely, he couldn't mean.... After all, Spock was Vulcan; beyond that, Spock was Spock. Nor was Spock the only expert at disassembling. Kirk shivered; had he slipped inadvertently? Or done something that Spock had finally picked up on? Perhaps Christine had at long last broken through Spock's icy exterior?... or Uhura?...someone else?

The tall, austere figure turned. Kirk stood rigidly, fear a shallow thing beside the unaccustomed panic that churned within

him. Sweat trickled down his side beneath his uniform shirt.

At last the dark eyes met his own. Spock's voice was a rough, sad whisper. "We both know the answer to that."

Kirk could not speak, could not reply against the dry cotton that filled his mouth. He could only stare, his thoughts a descending spiral of grief: God, my God, ...Spock knows. He knows. He knows....

"Therefore," Spock continued, "I will seek reassignment when we reach Starbase V. I cannot expect your forgiveness. Perhaps in time you will at least understand. It was...it is beyond my control."

Slowly, with as much dignity as he could manage at this, the most painful moment of revelation and of loss that he had ever known, Spock turned to the observation room door. It would lead him to an uncertain future, but at least he would cause the Human he loved no further pain.

Kirk choked out one word, and Spock froze.

"No!"

Spock turned. It would not be easy, but if Jim Kirk still wished to address him, Spock would listen. If Jim Kirk asked questions, Spock would answer. He owed this man at least that...and more. Regardless, the humiliation....

"Spock, go...if you must, but not because of me. Not to spare me. You asked me to forgive; I tell you there is nothing to forgive. When you stepped back onto the Bridge, I felt as if my world had come back into focus. I'm not sure how or when, but..." Kirk's voice broke, ragged, "do so because you must, because.... Not for my sake, Spock. Dear God! Not for my sake! Not again!"

Kirk closed his eyes and steadied himself with one hand against the railing.

Suddenly, a hard strength was holding Kirk, supporting him upright against the numbness in his legs. He clutched at the strength and found Spock's shoulders and back beneath his hands. He held fast to that incredibly warm strength.

Alien and Human clung to one another in a state of mutual shock. To find themselves in the midst of something so long denied... it was enough to remain thus, wrapped in one another's arms.

They remained unmoving, afraid of more, yet unwilling to accept less. Neither was entirely steady. Kirk kept his eyes closed. It was like being a little boy again. If he kept them closed, then maybe, just maybe, the dream and the arms holding him wouldn't vanish. Slowly the panic and pain subsided. Spock was real! His arms were real. The warmth radiating from the hard chest against Kirk's own was real. He drew a deep, cleansing breath. Only then did he feel the insanelly rapid beat of Spock's heart against

his abdomen and the slight tremor beneath his hands. At that moment, he realized, and would always remember, that Spock was the one who had crossed the distance between them.

"Spock?" whispered Kirk, intensely aware of the body pressed against him. The Vulcan stirred slightly, but remained in place, his arms locked around Kirk. "Spock, I can...I want to live with this." Kirk's words came low and earnest. "Can you? You were right; it is a breaking of all patterns for us both. Can you...are you willing to try?" Kirk turned his head, his lips almost but not quite brushing one elegant ear. "If...if you can't," he whispered, "I can live with that, too. Just...don't leave again," Kirk swallowed in sudden guilt, "unless there is no other way for you."

The Vulcan did move then, straightening, but maintaining his embrace around Kirk's waist and shoulders. He looked at last into the wide, hazel eyes, earnest, open. Kirk returned the dark regard.

"I shall not leave again," Spock intoned solemnly, "my t'hy'la. So you are. So you shall be."

Kirk felt the arms tighten ever so slightly about him. Then Spock backed away, releasing him. The Vulcan raised his left hand, fingers paired. Kirk knew it was not the Vulcan greeting, but he was not certain.... Spock's eyes did not leave Kirk's as slowly Kirk matched his gesture with his right hand. They touched their hands together, and slowly Spock began the ancient caress. There would be others, Human as well as Vulcan, but this Spock would share, now and forever, only with this being before him. He continued to hold the Human's gaze, reaching out carefully with his inner self.

Kirk shuddered at the first touch of Spock's mind. He opened himself to it, and with the capability they'd both long since recognized, reached back to Spock. He had no idea how long Spock maintained the link between them, but when it was over, it left him trembling. He understood many things now. They both did. One day soon he would have to cope with pon farr, but til then, Spock was functional: the hand Kirk held shook as surely as did his own with a passion as deep and as urgent. He drew the hand behind his back, pulling Spock to him. He had experienced the Vulcan touch; now it was time to share the Human.

Kirk touched the sloping cheeks. Then, hand at the back of Spock's neck, he pulled Spock closer yet. For a moment they stood, cheek to cheek, then his hand traveled slowly down to grasp the Vulcan's shoulder as he slowly turned his head.

The Human lips were cool and yielding against Spock's. The Vulcan shuddered. Kirk's arms tightened, extending his Human strength. The kiss changed, became an active seeking, a demand, a call.

Spock responded to that call, and Kirk found himself being kissed. Vulcan strength exerted itself slightly, and Spock's thoughts

sent tendrils of thrilling flame along Kirk's spine. He would have gasped had he been able. Instead, a throaty moan thrummed in Kirk's throat.

Spock pulled away abruptly. Kirk swayed, nearly falling, but strong arms supported him. "The intercom," managed Spock hoarsely.

Kirk straightened, cleared his throat, and stepped to the intercom. "Kirk here." He hoped he sounded normal.

"Sir," it was Uhura, "Mister Scott informed the Bridge that the main impulse systems are set for stage four tests. Shall I initiate them, or would you...?"

"Ah, no, that's fine, Uhura. You may initiate test runs. I'll be in my cabin," he glanced at Spock's motionless profile, "And, Uhura, unless something unusual comes up...."

"I understand, Admiral. Sleep well, sir." Uhura cut the intercom.

Kirk couldn't suppress a smile. "I doubt that she understands. And sleep isn't exactly on my mind."

"Jim, if you don't mind, I'll join you in twenty minutes."

Kirk could only nod before Spock was out the observation room doorway.



Kirk stepped out of the fresher and slipped on his robe. He adjusted the temperature controls of his cabin to a few degrees higher than normal.

He wanted, no, he needed a drink. The Saurian Brandy was tasteless fire passing over his tongue. His mind tumbled with images, all of which he tried to ignore, and failed. Suddenly, he laughed. How many years since he'd been this nervous? Too many, he decided. My God! He still reeled, thinking about it, about Spock. In two weeks he'd turn forty. Forty! Was that what his obsession with Spock was? Some sort of mid-life crisis? No. He sat at his desk, palming the glass of brandy. No, Spock was unique. His feelings toward his half-Vulcan friend were unique. Somehow, he knew that after this night there would be only Spock for him. Maybe there had always only been Spock for him. Kirk sat back, thinking of the women he'd known and loved. The numbers alone hadn't been, well, normal. Before he'd met Spock, his relationships had often been satisfying if a bit short. But then, a career in Starfleet.... He wasn't alone in the numbers of short affairs department. It came with the territory.

Then came his command of the ENTERPRISE and the beginnings of a relationship with Spock. At first he'd been uncomfortable with the half-Human. Spock had been so impenetrable, unmoveable, so very perfect. Kirk couldn't pinpoint the moment when Spock had made the transition from First Officer to friend. It had been a slow, care-

ful thing, particularly on the Vulcan's part. Kirk grinned, thinking how slowly and thoughtfully he'd courted the Vulcan's friendship, a friendship that once established had only deepened over the years, satisfying a need in them both, filling a place in their souls that no one else had filled, or could fill.

Kirk moved to refill his glass. He felt chilled in spite of the higher temperature setting. Just thinking about what had happened and was about to happen aroused him strongly. He willed himself to be calm. Until that moment five years ago--almost two years before Spock left for Gol and Kirk accepted the admiralty--Kirk had never had any inclination toward a same sex relationship. He'd never wanted any man until Spock. Hadn't wanted one after. Perhaps it was exactly what he'd finally concluded: some forms of love defy, transcend all barriers, all differences or similarities. For two years prior to Spock's departure, Kirk had walked a terrible line between overwhelming love and friendship. It had been a matter of personal pride that he'd never put Spock under any pressure, never given himself away. Frowning, he set down his glass. How ironic! All those years Spock had felt the same way--yet perhaps that didn't really matter. The pre-V'ger Spock couldn't have accepted what now lay between them.

Kirk turned to the cabin door, sensing something. It opened, admitting the Vulcan. Spock wore a long, brown robe that had the full, rich texture of velvet.

Neither spoke. It seemed unnecessary. Kirk carefully set down the glass he was holding. He felt flushed, unexpectedly embarrassed, perhaps even a bit fearful. He forced himself to look up at the Vulcan, and swayed internally. Spock had moved soundlessly to his side. The hooded eyes regarded him quizzically, then darted away and down.

Kirk found a smile. He wasn't the only one unnerved. He drew a deep breath and took Spock's hand. The dark eyes snapped back to his.

Their second kiss wasn't the same kind of system overload as had been the first, when both were almost too overwhelmed to enjoy it. This kiss was slow and searching: a promise, an exploration. Kirk could feel Spock's surprise at the depth of his un-Vulcan reaction. Again Kirk enjoyed exerting his Human strength in embracing Spock. It would have broken ribs in a Human. Spock responded with greater restraint.

The embrace ended slowly. Kirk was shocked at its effect. Spock sensed his dismay; his expression drew a low chuckle from his t'hy'la. "At this rate I'm not going to make it into bed."

Spock's pale blank look forced Kirk to continue in mild embarrassment. "All you had to do was kiss me and I nearly had an orgasm."

Spock's expression could only be called pleased relief. "I confess that I, too, was moved to my biological limits."

Kirk laughed aloud, realizing happily that even in love Spock would always remain Spock.

Spock was not distressed by Kirk's laughter, for the love radiating from Kirk like the heat of Vulcan's sun was all the reassurance he could ever wish for. Suddenly Kirk was hugging him fiercely. "Right now I don't give a damn about anything in the universe except that I have loved you, I do love you, and I always will love you," he choked out.

The tenderness was like a physical pain that enveloped the Vulcan. "Always and forever touching and touched," paraphrased Spock returning Kirk's possessive embrace.

At last Kirk pulled away, a rueful smile on his lips. He hesitated, not sure how to begin. Spock watched him struggle, not knowing how to help.

"God," blurted Kirk, "We've covered this galaxy end to end, faced impossible odds and bizarre situations. I've seen, Hell, I've been to every exotic port in every quadrant we've visited, and even a few off the beaten track, but...Spock... I've never.... Christ, listen to me! I sound like a green cadet! Spock, it's just that I don't, I mean I've never.... Hell, I'm no virgin, but I've never, this is too import...."

Suddenly, Kirk was caught up in a powerful embrace and silenced by a kiss. A strange sensation, like a fuzzy pressure, began behind his eyes then rushed over him, as if a potent drug had just entered his system. And with that rush of exhilaration came a certainty, a profound knowing, that left no room for fear or uncertainty.

And just as abruptly, he knew his deepest need, as well as Spock's. Kirk's need became primordial: to claim Spock as his, to know that never again would Spock leave him, to know with bedrock certainty that Spock couldn't leave him. At that moment, another opening, another pathway appeared, a portal laced with verdant fire. And Kirk understood. Always his links with Spock had been one way: Spock touching Kirk's mind, Kirk's thoughts, Kirk's emotions. At last here was a path, an invitation to a true meld. The being that was Spock waited patiently and fearfully for what was to come.

Like a golden nova, that which was Kirk entered fearlessly. Barriers that were a matter of reflex fell before the onslaught of the burning brightness that was Kirk. Cries of Joy, fear, and welcome thundered about that which was Kirk. On and on pressed Kirk until nothing that was Spock past and present had not succumbed to the caressing, possessing golden fire that was Kirk. Spock cried out aloud at the joy of this final surrender and eternal unity.

With that cry, Kirk withdrew a fraction of his inner awareness to concentrate upon his surroundings.

Somehow, they were both on the floor of his cabin, Spock's burning thighs clasped tightly around him. The Vulcan's buttocks and sphincter spasmed fiercely about Kirk's cock, embedded deeply within a molten velvet heat.

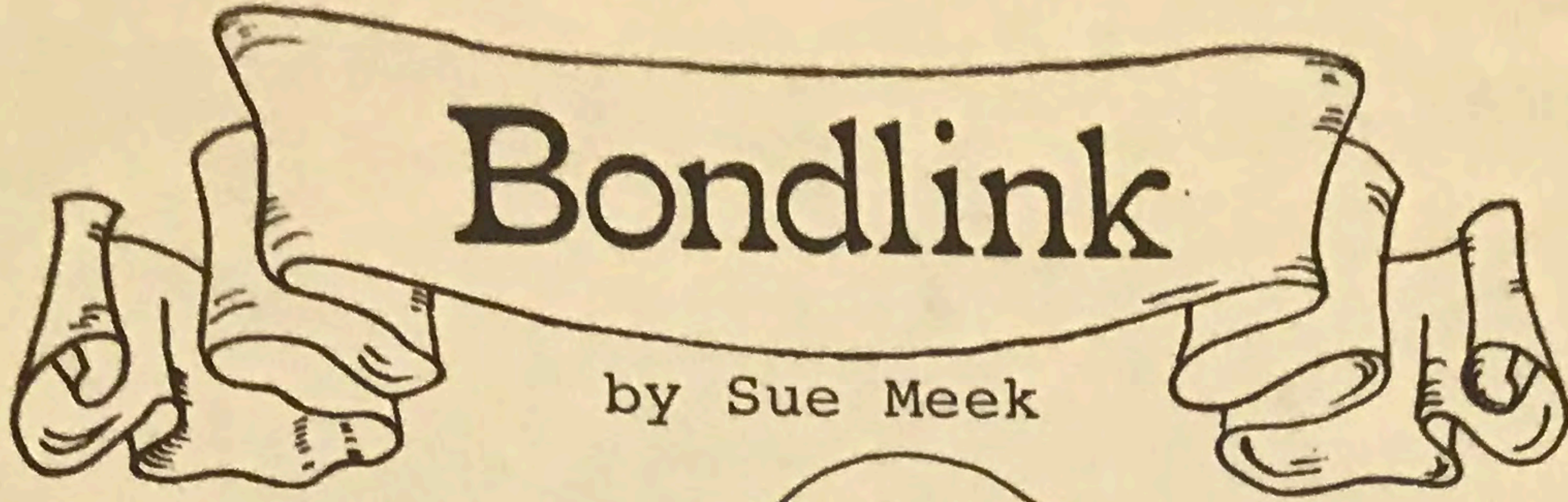
Kirk hesitated, "My God, I'm raping him!" But a mental wail of denial filled his mind. Powerful hands grasped his buttocks, pulling him deeper. With an animal cry of his own, Kirk thrust deeply into his beloved with both mind and body, claiming, punishing, conquering with an

almost savage fury and joy. The last of Kirk's pain, born of feelings of betrayal, burned itself out, until there was only flame and joy and need. The verdant flame joined with his in a corona of need and desire and ecstatic joy.

It was too much, ... too much. The fire contracted in upon itself, smaller and smaller, tighter and tighter, until at last it exploded in a nova of sensation that ended in blissful darkness.

Yet within the darkness there was a pulse, a distant beacon, but not a flame, rather an ember of warmth and homecoming for them both.





Bondlink

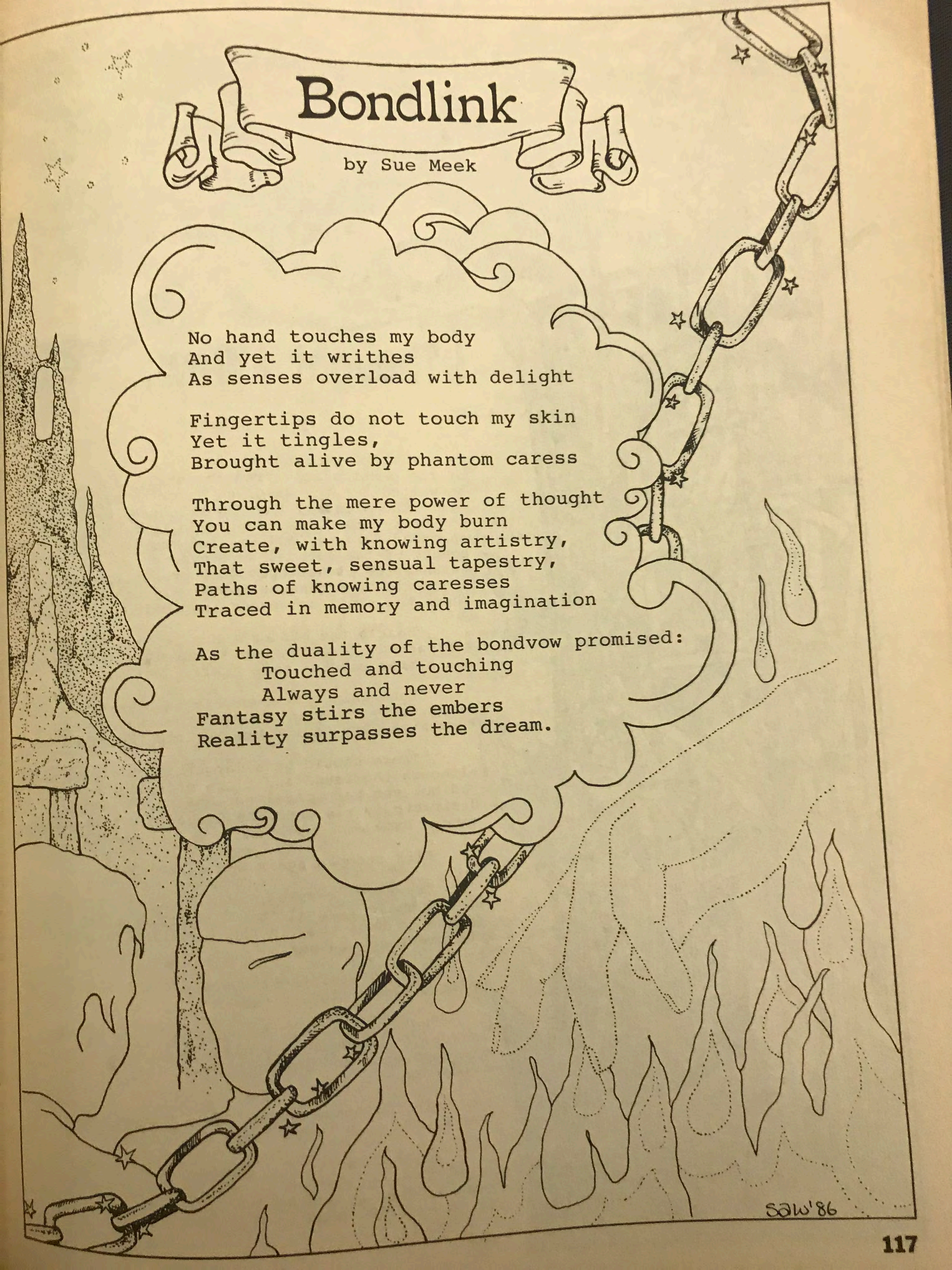
by Sue Meek

No hand touches my body
And yet it writhes
As senses overload with delight

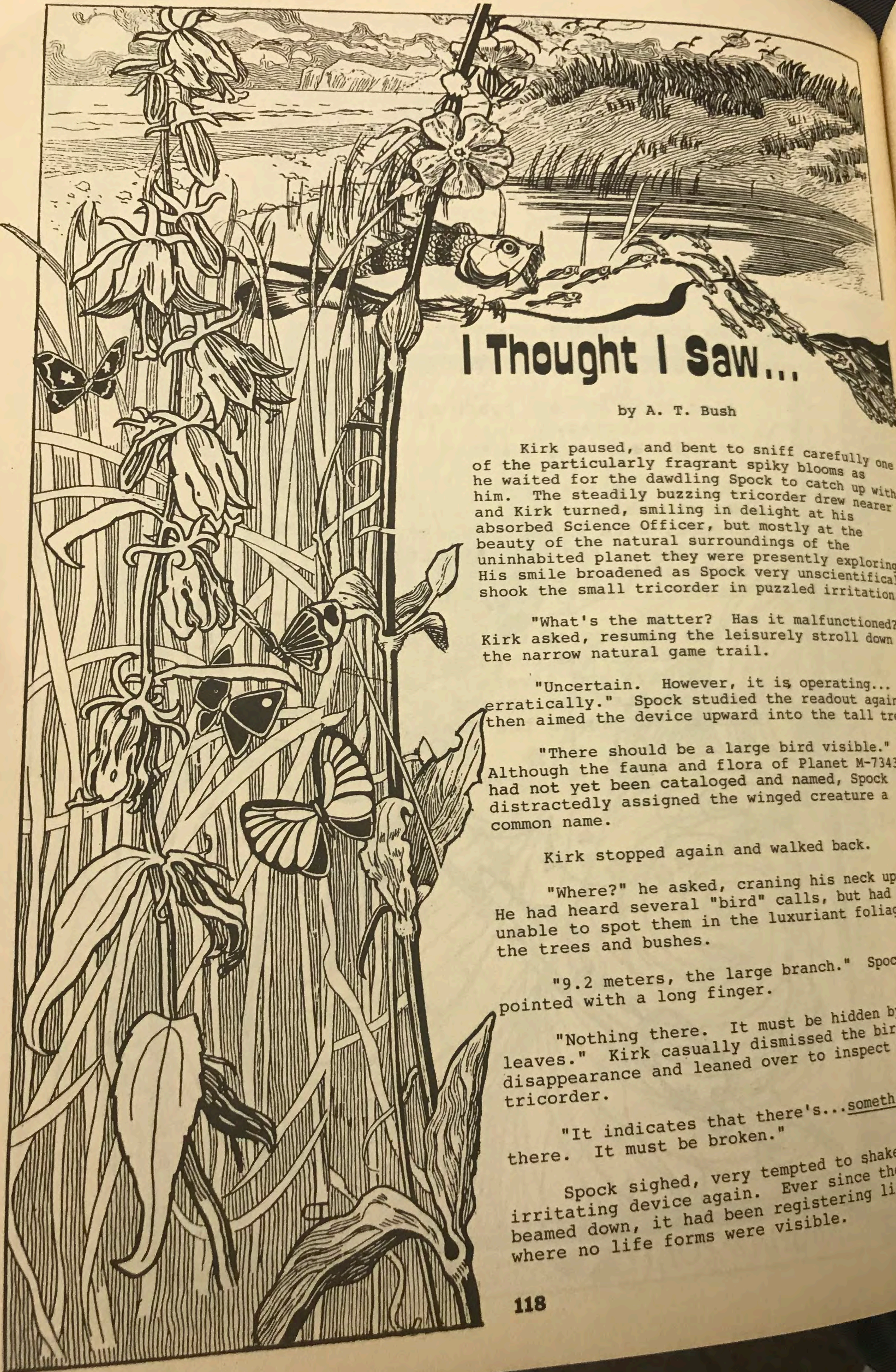
Fingertips do not touch my skin
Yet it tingles,
Brought alive by phantom caress

Through the mere power of thought
You can make my body burn
Create, with knowing artistry,
That sweet, sensual tapestry,
Paths of knowing caresses
Traced in memory and imagination

As the duality of the bondvow promised:
Touched and touching
Always and never
Fantasy stirs the embers
Reality surpasses the dream.



SDW'86



I Thought I Saw...

by A. T. Bush

Kirk paused, and bent to sniff carefully one of the particularly fragrant spiky blooms as he waited for the dawdling Spock to catch up with him. The steadily buzzing tricorder drew nearer and Kirk turned, smiling in delight at his absorbed Science Officer, but mostly at the beauty of the natural surroundings of the uninhabited planet they were presently exploring. His smile broadened as Spock very unscientifically shook the small tricorder in puzzled irritation.

"What's the matter? Has it malfunctioned?" Kirk asked, resuming the leisurely stroll down the narrow natural game trail.

"Uncertain. However, it is operating... erratically." Spock studied the readout again, then aimed the device upward into the tall trees.

"There should be a large bird visible." Although the fauna and flora of Planet M-7343 had not yet been cataloged and named, Spock distractedly assigned the winged creature a common name.

Kirk stopped again and walked back.

"Where?" he asked, craning his neck upward. He had heard several "bird" calls, but had been unable to spot them in the luxuriant foliage of the trees and bushes.

"9.2 meters, the large branch." Spock pointed with a long finger.

"Nothing there. It must be hidden by the leaves." Kirk casually dismissed the bird's disappearance and leaned over to inspect the tricorder.

"It indicates that there's...something there. It must be broken."

Spock sighed, very tempted to shake the irritating device again. Ever since they had beamed down, it had been registering life forms where no life forms were visible.

"power pack is minus
Kirk offered. "Maybe that's what
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equipment." Kirk noted in
label with the tricorder. Spock had
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"Power pack is minus one quarter, no, one fifth. Maybe that's what's wrong with it," Kirk offered. "Ship's Services usually maintains full power packs in all landing party equipment." Kirk noted the small "stickto" label with Spock's Service Number, indicating that the tricorder had been permanently requisitioned. Spock did not like other less-fussy personnel using his equipment.

"Power is completely sufficient." Spock said, a bit testily. He had not returned the tricorder to Services for reenergizing because the previous day's brief use had not expended it; and also he had neglected to check it that morning because Kirk had been especially romantically inclined and they had dallied in bed until almost time for duty shift. Indeed, he had barely had time to grab the device before landing party departure had been announced.

"So it is. Doesn't matter. Let's go get those samples." Kirk smiled, and hoisted the old-fashioned sampler farther onto his shoulder. He started down the trail again, noting that the tricorder continued to hum and whine sporadically. He glanced back to see Spock making adjustments to the controls as he followed. The core sampler was becoming quite heavy and he wondered again why Spock preferred the obsolete equipment. He suspected that Spock enjoyed manually rotating the borer and idly wondered if the action had some sexual or erotic connotation. A flash of memory of their lovemaking of the previous night came to mind. Yes, Spock certainly knew his business when it came to rotating and sinking shafts. Except, he had provided the.... The wrist comm beeped, distracting his erotic thoughts.

Five minutes later, every member of the large landing party had reported in and all tricorders were registering life forms which were not visible to the naked eye. Replacement equipment was beamed down, and promptly malfunctioned in the same manner.

"Spock? Do you think the trouble might be caused by that d-d-le-leleminide?" Kirk found that his ululating tongue wanted to add a few more "l's".

"Unknown. The mineral is so newly discovered, that its properties are not yet fully known." Spock succinctly reported the latest non-information from Starfleet Research.

The Scoutship Mowendown had only recently discovered the uninhabited planet and the new mineral. Starfleet had promptly dispatched the Enterprise to do more complete research.

"However, the tricorder is functioning properly in registering correctly all substances. Only native life forms seem to be affected."

Kirk knew that every living thing on the planet contained minute tracings of the ore and it had not seemed to be causing any problems. He briefly reviewed the information that had been submitted by the Mowendown. The planet had abundant life and their few survey pictures of the unique native fauna had been fascinating. And, at the moment, the Enterprise's prime mission and concern was to investigate the mineral deposits for possible future mining operations, if they proved useful.

"We've got an intriguing mystery on our hands, but nothing of an apparently dangerous

situation--so far. So, let's get that mineral sample, then we'll have more to work with."

"Affirmative. The specimens from the widely divergent areas should prove informative." Spock directed his tricorder toward the stream which ran near the mineral deposit which he had selected to investigate. He had deliberately chosen this site well away from the other members of the landing party, because it appeared to be the most interesting and because Kirk would enjoy the water and privacy.

"Need help?" Kirk asked, handing the sampler over. Spock took it easily.

"Negative, I prefer manipulating my equipment...alone."

Kirk couldn't help but grin, his thoughts returning to more suggestive actions.

"You didn't feel that way last night," he teased playfully, gently tapping Spock's arm.

Spock lowered his eyes, pretending to study the sharp point of the borer.

"Captain...Jim, that was last night," Spock reminded, looking up and smiling faintly and affectionately, pleased when Kirk smiled happily. His sincere efforts to "unbend" were having the desired effect upon his bondmate, and he had discovered that the attempts also pleased himself and were becoming progressively more effortless.

Kirk felt a surge of love flow through him. He knew that part of that exhilarating feeling was coming from Spock. Naturally affectionate, he had worried that his sometimes overt gestures would be displeasing to the Vulcan. But surprisingly, Spock loved it, even the occasionally silly or romantic moods that were part of his Human nature. Kirk took a deep, shivering breath, tempted to give Spock a most affectionate kiss.

"I'd better go and let you get to work. I think I'll take a look in the creek and see if I can spot any fish."

"There is a clearing...just there." Spock pointed down the trail. "The stream intersects the pathway." Spock curbed his impulse to add, "be careful".

"I'll find it...and I'll be careful. You be the same." Kirk expertly read Spock's expression and smiled again before continuing down the path.

Spock watched until Kirk's back disappeared around a sharp curve in the path, then set to work. He enjoyed the physical exertion required to secure the samples and had discovered that the relatively slow, manual extraction often produced a much purer specimen, unaffected by the heat created by the powered extractor. In some cases, obsolete methods were the most scientifically logical.

Kirk heard the crunching bite of the sampler going into the soil and strolled on toward the stream. It came into view, surprisingly close to Spock's work site, paralleling their earlier path. Kirk frowned to think of the beauty of the woods possibly being destroyed by some future mining operation. There was a natural clearing of close-cropped, very green grass, and one of the most beautiful streams Kirk had seen since leaving Earth. The short stroll brought him to the water's

edge and he peered down, noticing that the banks were extremely steep and the crystal clear water deceptively deep. He could literally count the pebbles on the bottom, and thought he saw a flash of movement as he approached. He had probably frightened away any nearby fishes.

He knelt down in a position to see any slight movements in the sparkling water, and curious, leaned over, dipping an experimental finger into the stream. He jerked it back from the very cold water. It was obviously a spring-fed stream or possibly snow water from the distant mountains. His initial notion of going for a swim quickly disappeared, despite the balminess of the weather. The slow, waving movement of an indolent fish-tail caught his eye and he leaned closer again. As the startlingly orange-colored fish came nearer, he was surprised to see its striking similarities to certain earth varieties. Although almost everything that swam in water usually had certain characteristics, he always marveled at the "logicality" of the cosmic plan. He chuckled in delight as the small fish's puckered mouth emitted a tiny bubble. So much for his profound thoughts.

He idly thought of how much he sometimes missed Earth, although the duty at Starfleet Command had not afforded very much time to enjoy his native planet. He had found that he was almost as restricted by office duty as he had been in the confinement of a starship. And Spock had been out of his life then. Forever, he had thought.

He listened a moment to see if he could hear the borer at work. He couldn't detect its sound but the natural, woodsy noises were clear. He listened alertly as a bird began to call in the nearby trees. Its call grew raucous and he looked up, attempting to spot it. The heavy branches of the fruit tree were dense, prohibiting a view of the inner limbs. He happily went back to watching the visiting fish that had now been joined by several others. He decided that it must be a mother and her babies. He remained motionless as more and more fish arrived, darting down to the bottom to nibble on what appeared to be ragged pieces of decaying fruit that had fallen from the overhanging branches. As if to confirm his suspicions, he heard a splashing plop, and watched the deep-purple colored fruit seem to zigzag its way through the currents and come to rest on the pebbles. The sun's diffraction through the water made the fruit appear to be animate as the rays played over it.

He noticed that the fish had again disappeared at the frightening disturbance of the water. They slowly emerged from their hiding place, which seemed to be directly beneath him, in some kind of overhang. He waited patiently for another overripe fruit to fall to confirm their hiding place. More and more fish of different colors and sizes were arriving to partake of the meal. He chuckled quietly as fierce games of chase/thief began as the fish nibbled the fruit and darted away carrying their meal, only to have it stolen by a hungry pursuer. As he studied them closely, he began to notice peculiarities. Some of the larger orange-colored fish and newly arrived pale-green ones seemed to be spotted, almost transparent on the tail fins and gills. Peering closer, he noticed that the smallest of the fish seemed to be only orange dots, their entire bodies almost invisible. Excited by his discovery, he got to his feet, to summon Spock to investigate the phenomenon. The nearly invisible fish might explain why the

tricorder was registering life forms where none were visible.

"Invisibility," he whispered to himself, then bawled. "Spock! Spock! Come here!" His loud call and the resultant sound waves on the water, startled the sensitive fish into hiding again. "Damn, what if they don't come back. Spock won't believe this." He leaned out as far as possible, peering back under the overhang. He thought he heard the muffled sound of running feet on grass and began to turn when a sharp protrusion came into surprising contact with his butt! With a yelp, Kirk launched himself forward and away from the contact, and in even greater surprise, felt a falling sensation—right into the icy-cold water! His second yelp of surprise was a watery, gasping gurgle.

Spock had just closed the sample case and picked up the equipment when he heard the summons. The call was not one of alarm, although quite urgent. He hurried down the path and entered the clearing simultaneously with Kirk's headlong leap into the water. No doubt, Jim had decided to invite him to partake of a midday swim before returning to the ship. But Kirk was capable of a much more graceful dive; and why was the Captain fully clothed? Spock ran to the embankment, dropped the equipment on the grass and peered over into the stream. Kirk was rising very fast through the clear water and he could see the hazel, more green, of his wide-open eyes.

Kirk was spouting water and yelling invectives the moment his head broke the surface and he spotted Spock. He continued as he swam the few strokes to the bank and scrabbled for a handhold in the exposed roots of the grass and small shrubs. The earth quickly turned to mud and he slid under the water again. The inept attempt infuriated him further and besides, the ice-cold water was literally freezing his balls off.

"Dammit! Goddammit! Help me out! You shitty Vulcan, you certainly pick the damndest times to display your weird-ass humor." Kirk croaked, coughing slightly and shaking his head to displace the water that had filled his ears. He treaded water furiously and grabbed for another handhold.

Stunned by the accusatory vulgarities and angry tone of voice, Spock stood frozen as Kirk's second attempt to extricate himself from the stream failed. As Kirk's head popped up again, Spock galvanized into action, worried that Kirk would drown if he did not give his assistance. Spock placed his feet securely and as Kirk raised a hand, Spock caught the cold appendage and hoisted an ice-cold, dripping and very angry Captain from the water. He winced as Kirk angrily jerked away and shot several more indistinguishable curses in his direction. Kirk was radiating his furiousness, far and wide.

It was common knowledge that the Captain had a temper, sometimes violent, but thankfully, Spock had never before been the object of such a vitriolic outpouring. He cautiously moved away from Kirk and the stream, in case Kirk attempted an act of retaliation for some mysterious act that he was not guilty of committing. He waited in confused trepidation for the curses to stop. Finally, Kirk did run down and silently glared at him. The piercing eyes were more eloquently angry than the words had been. Spock expected an explanation for the abusive language and kept silent. He could see that Kirk was uninjured.

Kirk ran his hands through his dripping hair,

not taking his eyes from the uncomfortable and guilty-looking (to his eyes) Vulcan.

"That water is about thirty degrees." Kirk said sarcastically, already shivering. "I'm colder than ice." Kirk elaborated when Spock remained silent.

Not knowing how to respond, Spock promptly brought his tricorder into play to confirm Kirk's claim.

"Precisely 55 degrees, Fahrenheit," Spock reported, shutting off the device.

Kirk's face turned from pale, cold white to hot, fiery red. He stiffened and brought his teeth down sharply on his lower lip, partly in anger and partly to keep it from quivering from cold.

"You...summoned me?" Spock asked tentatively, wondering if he should move even farther away until Kirk had gained control of himself. He waited several seconds for that accomplishment. Kirk was beginning to shiver badly in what had to be a clammy, wet uniform. Spock could sympathize fully with his plight.

"I did. I think I've discovered why life forms aren't visible. There's little fish in there," he paused to point at the stream as though fish would be living somewhere else, "who are virtually invisible. I noticed it and called you to confirm it. Then you...you fucking bastard, you jabbed me with that damn shitty borer! It was sharp, too!" Kirk pointedly rubbed his left buttock for emphasis. He glared at the guilty, discarded equipment, tempted to test its floating capabilities.

Kirk's speculative disclosure and the repeated, vulgar accusations warred for attention in Spock's mind. He decided to settle on the mysterious invisibility and edged around a dripping Kirk to peer into the stream. He brought the tricorder up again and confirmed that several of the fish were, indeed, virtually invisible, except for small patches of color.

"Perhaps, the deleliminide has properties which render..." he turned back as Kirk moved up beside him, wary that Kirk would attempt to push him into the stream, although Kirk's retaliative anger was now more likely to take another direction.

"Is it in the water? Or what? Do you suppose that I'll...become invisible?"

Suddenly the idea appealed to Kirk. He would simply remove his wet clothing and beam aboard nude. It would be much less embarrassing than arriving on the Enterprise in his present sopping-wet condition. Everyone on the ship would hear of his little accident and it would be a source of jokes, bad jokes and humorous little quips for weeks. His "accident prone" tendencies had always been a great source of amusement, although he actually had fewer accidents than anyone.

"I do not believe that your brief exposure will render you invisible. Perhaps ingestion of the mineral..." Spock noticed the fruits that were littering the floor of the stream and turned his tricorder on the nearby fruit trees.

"There is an extremely high concentration in that particular fruit." He reported the scientific curiosity.

"Then that pretty much explains it. The fish gorge on that. So do all the other animals. Mystery solved."

Spock sighed, shaking his head at Kirk's oversimplification.

"The mystery has only just begun."

"Not to me. That's your department and you'd better get to it, Mr. Science Officer. I want a report on my desk by this afternoon." Kirk grinned smugly at Spock's startled expression. That would teach the nasty joke-playing Vulcan a thing or two.

"Captain?" Spock called as Kirk stalked back into the clearing, the squishing sounds of water in the trouser/boots very noisy.

Kirk didn't turn, but kept his back to Spock. He didn't want Spock to see the fuming expression still on his face. Spock was most likely feeling his discomfort and displeasure very plainly through their link.

"Jim," Spock thought to bring a more personal tone to his voice. The accusation of misconduct had been so surprising, he remembered that he had not yet denied it.

"Jim, I did not jab your.... I did not cause you to fall in the stream."

Kirk whirled, eyes squinted.

"Now! You're denying it? You must think I'm a fool. You...You...! There isn't anyone else here!" Kirk sputtered, and brought his wrist com up, hoping the device was not water-logged or damaged.

In another moment, Kirk had dematerialized, leaving Spock standing in the middle of the clearing with his mouth very unVulcanly agape. Alarmed at Kirk's continuing anger and hurt by the lack of trust, Spock quickly gathered up the equipment and beamed up. He went directly to the science lab for the correlation of the urgent report. James T. Kirk was, first, the Captain of the Enterprise and his commanding officer, and only secondly, a very much loved bondmate. It was obvious that someone had been in the clearing and had "jabbed" Kirk, causing him to leap into the stream. If the individual were very speedy, he could have assaulted Kirk and gained concealment in the bushes before Spock had arrived. Spock began by reviewing the landing party roster, their locations, and all the readings that had been taken from the planet.

Kirk's anger dissolved sometime during the warming shower. It wasn't the first time he had fallen into icy streams, or been drenched in a cold rain shower. No damage had been done, except to his dignity, and they had been alone, so none of the crew had witnessed his wild flop into the water. So what if Spock had played a harmless joke on him! Spock had that right. He had also obviously become frightened by his impulsively sudden anger, and denied it. That was also common enough, particularly in adolescent behavior; and Spock was very young when it came to jokes and game playing. Kirk could easily recall several youthful incidents when he had perpetrated a backfiring joke and then had automatically denied involvement. And he had been shamefully harsh, downright nasty and vulgar with his name-calling. He began to feel sheepish, and vowed that he would apologize at the first opportunity and give Spock a chance to

confess his mischievous prank. Then, they would kiss and make up. And he would do something especially nice for Spock. That very night.

He contemplated some special sexual act that would have Spock literally climbing the walls. Spock's extreme sensitivity and unexpected sensuality still surprised him. He had never been with anyone who could get so hot, so fast. Often he found himself in a delightfully disadvantageous position before he knew what was happening. Like just last night...., he mused, idly showering.

Feeling more tense and fatigued than usual, he had joined Spock in bed, fully intending to go to sleep immediately. Instead, Spock had petted and kissed him until he was aroused. Spock positioned him toward the foot of the bed and he had compliantly cooperated. Spock had occasionally masturbated him in that position and when Spock had spread his long legs, indicating that he should assume a position between them, he hadn't quite known what Spock had in mind. He vaguely recalled a similar position from some ancient tantric sex manual, and eagerly draped his legs over Spock's thighs, scooting as close as possible. Fussy as always, Spock had not deigned to begin until he was comfortably propped against the pillows/headboard and Kirk was equally comfortable with a pillow under his head. After generously lubricating him, Spock had proceeded to stroke his cock slowly, sensuously. He had sighed contentedly, enjoying the comfort of the restful, passive position. Spock had brought him close to orgasm several times and although in a near-daze by that time, he had immediately noticed when Spock removed his caressing hands. He had moaned a protest as Spock again adjusted their position on the bed. It was then he had felt the extreme heat of the aroused Vulcan cock. He had levered himself up, and watched as Spock pressed the erect green cock downward between his buttocks. He knew now what Spock had in mind and cooperated fully.

The long, slick fingers had already been inside him and he was well-lubricated and totally receptive. Slowly and gently, Spock had slipped his cock inside him, the ridges of the cockhead sliding over his already stimulated glands. He had voluntarily squirmed closer until he could feel the springy pubic hair against his balls and ass. He felt the familiar flexing as Spock exerted some mystical Vulcan control over the cock's erectile muscles. He recalled several times when Spock had orgasmed without thrusting.

The caressing hands came again and Kirk had not had the presence of mind to think about Spock's orgasm. His own tantalizing one hovered on the brink. As the long fingers played over and around his cockhead, he found himself undulating his body urging Spock to enclose his shaft as well. The satisfying, stimulating fullness inside him increased the pressure as Spock teased him near to climax again. He knew he was in Spock's gentle, benevolent power and reveled in the sensations. When Spock decided to grant their orgasms, he would; so Kirk lay back, relinquishing his own control completely.

And Spock had made it very good for him, for both of them. Their orgasms had been powerful and extremely satisfying. He only vaguely recalled being gently swabbed clean and turned in the bed again. He had slept wonderfully and awoke early, relaxed and completely refreshed with Spock softly snoring by his side. He had fractionally turned up the lighting and gazed at his sleeping mate for a

long time, in near awed wonder and telling himself as he did every day, how lucky he was. Finally, after years of searching and sometimes being devastatingly hurt or disappointed, he had found the perfect love for him.

He had thought it extremely unusual to have been friends for so long and then become lovers, but their knowledge of each other and the closeness that he had felt for years had strengthened their intimate relationship. Although he had bitterly decried Spock's decision to return to Vulcan and his desire to attain the Kohlinahr, that experience had greatly helped Spock, plus his self-revealing encounter with V'ger. The three-year separation had somehow changed and elevated their previous relationship to a higher plane. In his case, absence had truly made his heart grow fonder. He had missed Spock abysmally, and Spock had confessed to missing him just as badly. As Spock had told him and as he believed himself, their loving bonding had been preordained and inevitable. They were truly meant for each other.

Kirk fastened the slightly damp perscan monitor around his wonderfully dry tunic and checked his appearance in the mirror, brushing at a strand of out of place hair. He intended to go directly to the Science Lab and apologize to Spock, then when duty shift ended, he would apologize more intimately.

Kirk walked into organized confusion, and Spock seemed to be personally directing the hectic activity. Not since the last life-and-death mission had he seen such scurrying. Before Spock had a chance to spot him through the clustered personnel, Kirk backed out of the lab before getting completely run over. The apology would have to wait until things slowed down to normal.

As he sat on the bridge, a gnawing sense of guilt began to plague him. He should have interrupted Spock and dragged him away to a private place and cleared the air. He wasn't being fair to Spock, either. But then again, Spock had had absolutely no business practically shoving him into that cold water. Kirk discovered that his Human ability to rationalize was working a bit overtime. He cleared his mind of personal business and participated in the conversation and speculations that were going on among the comparatively idle bridge crew.

At duty-shift end, Spock had not returned to his station and Kirk went directly to his quarters, knowing that a complete, or at the very least an extensive, preliminary report would be on his desk. And perhaps a note of apology, explaining the prank. Only the report was evident and Kirk sighed, wondering if he had made Spock angry in sheer self defense.

As Kirk studied the report, he discovered that deeleminide did, indeed, have some interesting properties. An aficionado of ancient movies, Kirk had seen the story of the Invisible Man and knew fully all the drawbacks of such a state. Still, it had some intriguing possibilities. In his younger days, he would have given a lot to be able to sneak unseen into certain of the crewwomen's quarters. Those days were long behind him. Presently, the element interested him solely from a scientific/military standpoint.

He was pleased that his haphazard guess was proving to be accurate. No doubt, Spock would eventually compliment him on his illogical, uncanny ability to guess the answers to certain

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puzzles. And a compliment to Spock for his prompt work was also in order. Kirk buzzed his Science Officer's quarters and received no answer. Spock was most probably still directing the research in the Science Lab, although his duty shift was long over. It was not an uncommon occurrence for the inspired scientific personnel to remain after their shifts, particularly when their dedicated chief was on hand and had presented an interesting problem.

Kirk finished his perusal of the report, noting the speculations on the practical uses for the unusual element. The currently-employed cloaking device could do with a bit of updating, if some brilliant scientist could come up with the plasma energy necessary to activate the deeleminide. Kirk had his money on Spock, although he did not spend the long hours in the lab that he had previously. Still, the magnificent mind that could think on two or three things simultaneously was never idle. He wondered if, perhaps, he hadn't been asking for too much of Spock's time. But Spock was always eager to be with him. Except for now, Kirk thought morosely, and headed for the lab.

Spock pushed back from the console, straightening his lank frame and relaxing his cramped muscles. It had been a very long, tiring day with much activity, although he had enjoyed the mental stimulation and discoveries that he and his personnel had made. There was still much to be learned, but his weary mind demanded a short rest period. And he was hungry. Formerly apathetic toward food, he had become accustomed to eating regularly with Kirk, if only a salad, and his stomach now demanded nourishment. His time sense told him that it was far past their usual dinner hour and Kirk had probably already eaten.

He sighed and concentrated for a moment on the bonding link. Earlier, he had felt a lessening of tension and Kirk's anger had dissipated rapidly. Still, the accusations and curses had greatly upset him, more than he liked to admit to himself. As McCoy would have said, he discovered that his "feelings were hurt". The lack of trust was particularly painful. No matter how implausible, he would have believed anything that Kirk told him. And, previously, Kirk had always returned that trust.

Still, there was the mystery of who had assaulted the Captain, escaping to leave him on-the-scene and with the alleged "smoking weapon" practically in his hand. Spock could not fathom how Kirk could even think he would employ such a sharp-pointed device on him, particularly on the neat mounds that Spock admired so fondly. He suspected that Kirk, in his anger, had exaggerated the sharpness of the weapon and the seriousness of the injury. A quick check had indicated that Kirk had not sought medical attention. Spock longed to investigate the area of injury for first-hand observation. Since he knew, very intimately, every curve and indentation on the delectable, muscular buttocks, any change would be readily detectable. And an examination might give a clue as to the type of weapon employed. And if Kirk had actually been injured, someone would pay! The object of his distracted thoughts appeared by his side and he glanced up, noting the calmness of the beloved face and the faint, apologetic smile on the sweetly upcurved lips.

"I wish to examine your injury." Spock requested, before fully realizing how Kirk would interpret his blunt words.

Kirk blinked in surprise and glanced around the still-busy lab. Thankfully, no one was within hearing distance.

"Here?" Kirk asked, near-dumbfounded.

"No! No." Spock said quickly. "In privacy. I must inspect...the point of impact. The depth of penetra...." Spock abruptly shut his mouth as a teasing grin suddenly appeared on Kirk's face. They both knew that whenever alone and even partially unclothed, circumstances often went beyond their control.

"I'm agreeable. Now?" Kirk asked eagerly. The opportunity to get Spock alone had just presented itself and he wasn't about to let it slip away.

For an answer, Spock got to his feet, leading the way out of the lab. As they threaded their way past the lab tables, Spock couldn't help but notice the sidelong glances being cast their way. He had not yet become accustomed to the fact that their personal relationship was public knowledge. He wasn't surprised to see several expressions of admiration and held his head high with pride. He knew fully how fortunate he was that Kirk had chosen him to love, had chosen him to bond with.

They remained silent on the journey to Spock's quarters with Kirk nodding greetings to the other off-duty personnel. As the door closed behind them, Spock turned, waiting for Kirk to display his injury. Kirk didn't seem inclined to do so immediately and was instead advancing on him. The apologetic smile was back.

"I want to say that I'm truly sorry that I cursed you. That's unforgiveable and I must do something about my rotten temper. My verbal attack must have frightened you. I'm sorry," Kirk said softly, coming within arm's reach. Now, if Spock would confess to the prank and take him in his arms, everything would be all right again.

Spock sighed, reaching to grasp Kirk's bare arms below the short sleeve of the trim, white tunic. He squeezed gently, feeling the strong muscles and his own surging emotions.

"Nothing you could ever do would be unforgiveable. However, I am not accustomed to being...verbally assaulted quite so vehemently. You are, nevertheless, forgiven." "My love," Spock added silently.

Kirk grabbed Spock and gave him a quick, thankful hug, then stepped back, swiftly unfastening his trousers, and skinning them and the briefs down to his knees. He turned, presenting his naked backside for Spock's inspection.

"Want to kiss it and make it better?" Kirk grinned over his shoulder.

"Illogical, but perhaps that will produce a...salutory effort."

At first glance, Spock could detect no sign of the injury. It had obviously not been as grievous as Kirk claimed and it was also difficult to discern any bruised puncture due to the intriguing dimples on the sweet curves.

"Where exactly is the location of the injury?" Spock asked, finally. He leaned down to get a better viewing position of the left

buttock, which Kirk had earlier indicated was the offended portion.

"Right there." Kirk pointed back and around in the general vicinity.

"I was leaning over, sort of like this..." Kirk successfully placed his posterior in close proximity to Spock's face. So close, in fact, he could feel the warm breath. His buttocks promptly pimpled with gooseflesh.

Spock could not see any signs of damage, but placed a soft kiss on the generally indicated area. He now knew that Kirk had exaggerated the injury, although it was possible that a slight bruise might appear later. He would also be quite illogically willing to kiss it and make it better. He kissed it again, anyway.

"Thank you," Kirk murmured, waiting for Spock to continue with some kind of overture. He liked it a lot when Spock kissed his butt, usually as a preliminary to very good lovemaking. When no more caresses were forthcoming, he sighed and hoisted the briefs and trousers and re-fastened them securely.

"Besides, you know perfectly well where you stuck me."

"Jim, I did not...."

Kirk's quick anger threatened to boil over again. He whirled around.

"You saw the mark. Now, how you can continue to deny it is...."

"There is no visible sign of damage. I did not...."

"Spock, you...you..." Kirk stopped to look more closely at Spock's bewildered and hurt expression. He had almost done it again. And if Spock still claimed innocence, after the opportunity to come clean, then Kirk had better rethink the incident. Spock had never outright lied to him. And bondmates, in particular, never lied to each other.

"Wait a minute. You really didn't, did you?"

Spock shook his head, afraid to verbally deny it again.

"I'm sorry...again. I jumped to conclusions. Since you were the only person about, I thought, later, that you had pulled a joke on me and refused to admit it. I should have known better. You wouldn't do that to me, would you?" Kirk felt a great relief, because Spock was feeling the same thing. And now that they were communicating freely, it could only get better.

"I don't think so. However, since I have been accused of such a juvenile action, I might be tempted to perpetrate...." Spock shrugged eloquently.

Kirk grinned delightedly at the devilish expression on the loved face.

"Sort of like that old saying: might as well be hanged for a lion as for a lamb? Okay, whenever you feel like it. I certainly owe you one. Let's just...kiss and make up--and go to dinner. I'm starved!" Kirk didn't wait for the kiss, but took it, enthusiastically. Spock returned it just as fervently. When Spock didn't seem inclined to break the embrace, he

relaxed into the strong arms, letting the suddenly demanding lips capture his completely. Just when he began to think that they would both become aroused to the point of having to do something about it, his stomach gave a loud growl. The romantic mood was broken and Spock released him with a sigh. It was an equally hungry Spock who tugged him from the room.

Over dinner, they discussed the possibility that a mischievous Enterprise crewman had somehow beamed down within their general vicinity. Spock, who had already checked the transporter records, was fairly certain that that had not happened. Since all surveys had indicated that the planet was uninhabited by sentient life, the only remaining possibility was that an animal had attacked Kirk. All the cataloged fauna were well on the small side and the petite deer-like animals were dismissed as suspects since even the mature, horned adults could not reach as high as Kirk's posterior.

"But it was something...sort of sharp--mainly, very unexpected! I'm positive of that," Kirk continued to insist, although he had reevaluated and downgraded his initial, wild claim of a vicious stab. Now the statement coincided more with the actual facts.

"I will take your word," Spock said graciously, sipping his favorite beverage while preparing his fork to attack the mound of mixed vegetables.

"Hi, Spock. Jim, I heard you took a swim today. With all your clothes on," McCoy said, in the way of a greeting to Kirk.

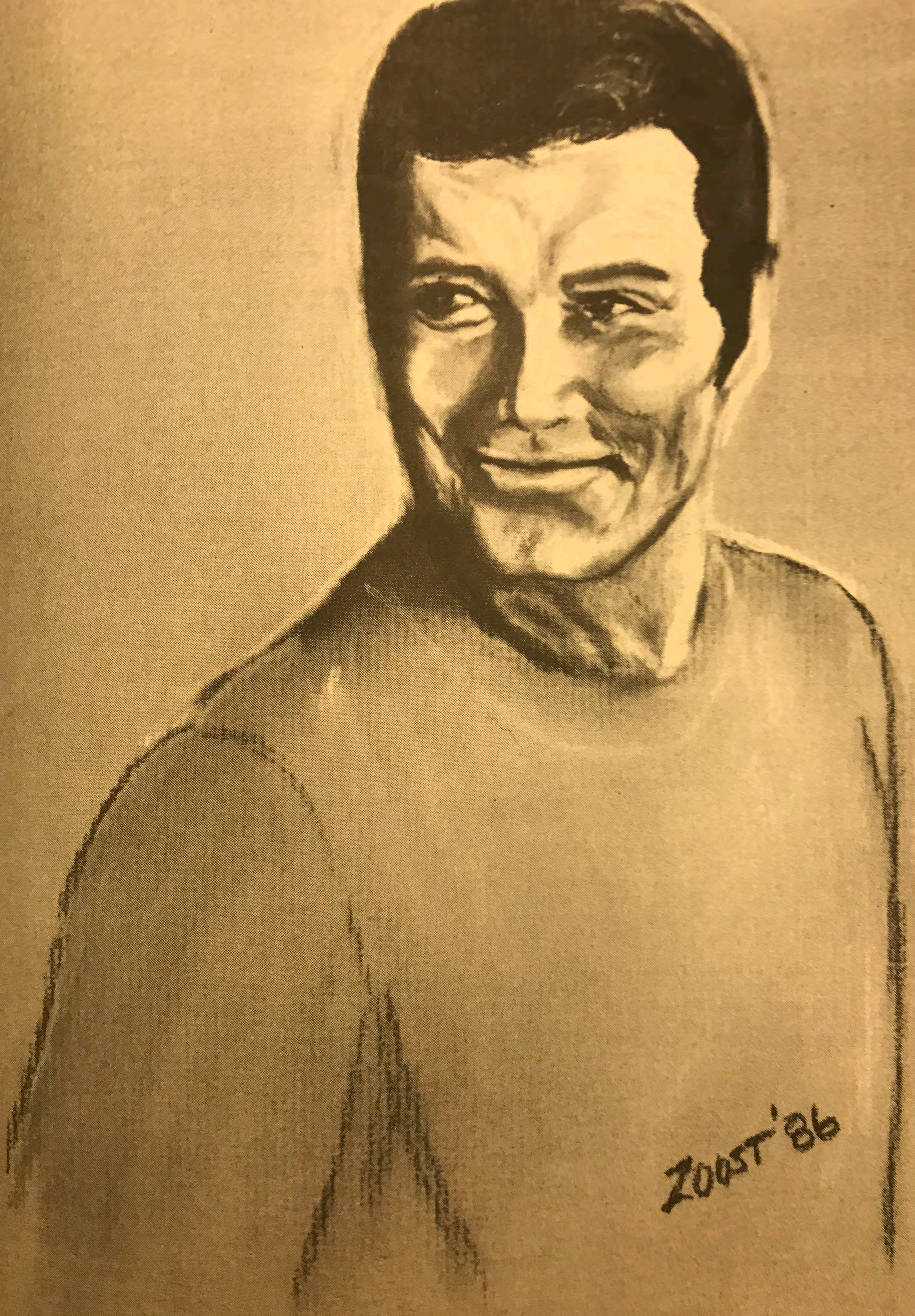
Spock sighed inaudibly as he glanced up at the teasing McCoy and at the overloaded dinner tray. He noticed the large slices of cornbread and wished he had selected two pieces instead of the one which he had already consumed. As far as he could determine, their mutual liking for that Southern staple was their only culinary link in common. He quickly averted his eyes from the golden-brown pieces of chicken. He couldn't, however, ignore the forked piece of cornbread that was being offered and nodded acceptance, attempting to swallow in order to more politely express his gratitude.

Since his return to the ship, in a "leathery, dried-out, emaciated condition", McCoy's disparaging medical opinion, Kirk and the Doctor had been subtly and not-so-subtly urging him to eat more. His weight was still subnormal, but he was rapidly filling out his frame again. In private, Kirk had insinuated that he disliked "bony" bed partners. That hint was a powerful incentive.

"Have a seat, Bones." Kirk invited, watching the byplay between the feigned enemies. He made a mental note to inform Spock someday of the totally readable expression of hunger he sometimes got on his supposedly unemotional facade of a face. And it appeared at times when food was nowhere in sight. He brought his thoughts back to McCoy's jibe.

"I took a little dip...in very cold water," he admitted, shifting as McCoy took a place.

"Catch a cold?" McCoy asked conversationally. He could always tell when Kirk had a cold. A redder, runnier nose was not to be found on the ship, plus Kirk was meaner than a wounded grizzly bear.



"Nope. I'm too healthy. Besides, you know that plomeek soup I've been sampling lately is guaranteed to prevent colds. You know Spock never gets a cold. You ought to look into its curative possibilities, too." Kirk hoped to distract McCoy from his teasing about the ill-fated accident.

McCoy simply snorted and dug into his black-eyed peas.

Spock stared at Kirk's very near-fabrication. The two times that Kirk had deigned to taste the Vulcan soup, he had grimaced and seemed to force himself to swallow the thick mixture. Spock elevated a chiding eyebrow and turned his attention back to his meal. He only half-listened as they desultorily discussed the present mission and ship's business.

"By the way, Spock. Ensign Walters claims he saw a...a great big disembodied horn floating in the air. Scared the sh...scared him. Did you see anything?" McCoy neatly cleaned up his statement for Spock's benefit. Besides, Spock was ignoring them, somewhere off in his private little world, probably thinking "logical" thoughts, since he wasn't hanging on Kirk's every word.

Spock's head shot up at that bit of news. There had been no such mention in the official reports. But then again, that kind of claim would elicit quite a few cautious or disbelieving looks from one's fellow crewmates.

"No, I did not. Only one, Doctor?" Spock refused to encourage McCoy, who was again grinning teasingly.

"So the rumor goes. The gossip said that he saw a long, spiral...sharp. Came right for him, then shot off into the bushes." McCoy zoomed his hand in a good imitation.

Spock wasn't the only one showing his interest now. Kirk glanced significantly at him, grinning smugly.

As soon as courtesy permitted, Spock excused himself and went to find Ensign Walters. The man was young, but a qualified and efficient scientist. He suspected that it had not been Walters himself who had mentioned the unusual sighting, but his survey partner, Yeoman Sims. Sims was a youngster well-known for his inventive practical jokes and very reminiscent of a youthful, mischievous Chekov. And producing a "floating" horn would not be above his capabilities.

Spock questioned the Ensign closely, finally becoming convinced that the sighting was genuine after the scientist described the galloping, bobbing movements of the ivory horn and after hearing the tricorder tape of the sound of hooves striking the stony ground. No one went to quite such elaborate means to perpetrate a practical joke. Spock expressed his gratitude, then reprimanded the young officer for failure to report all of the recorded data.

He went directly to the Captain's quarters, confident that he had information that Kirk would accept. He wondered what sort of animal possessed only one ivory horn and was audacious enough to attack Humans. He studied Ensign Walter's sketches and decided that the mystery was not completely solved yet.

"I told you something jabbed me." Kirk reiterated as Spock entered the office.

"I never doubted that. I witnessed your leap into the water. There are truly unseen things on the planet." Spock briefly described

the Ensign's experience and presented the artistic drawings.

"Hmm...very interesting. A spiraled horn... wait a minute!" Kirk turned to the computer tie-in. A few brief words of instructions and the wall viewer filled with various artistic representations of the mythical unicorn.

"Same horn! I'll be damned! We've discovered the unicorn!"

"A unicorn, perhaps," Spock cautioned, wondering if the animal's body had anything like the gracefulness of the mythical beast.

"I wonder..." Kirk mused.

"What?" Spock asked curiously, and growing more and more curious at Kirk's speculative expression.

"I wonder if that myth about the aphrodisiac is true."

"Even if it is, I assure you that you are in no need of such a substance."

That brought a pleased smile to Kirk's face. His Human ego needed an occasional compliment to his male virility.

"Neither do you. But sometime, in the future, when I'm past my prime, it would be nice to know I had something to fall back on, just to keep up with you."

"I doubt you will have any trouble. I suggest that several landing parties be dispatched to investigate the possibilities of this animal's existence."

"Hm. I believe that I read in the report that the fruiting season is almost over, so all the animals, fish, and birds, should soon become visible again. Is that what you're getting at?"

"Definite proof would be welcome. Also, the shedding of the antlers from the small deer-like creatures has begun, and I am only speculating that the "unicorn" will also shed its horn."

"That's...logical. God, I'd love to have one for a souvenir. But if they don't shed, well, even a picture would be nice." Kirk sighed, wondering where he could hang one of the horns for a decoration. And just perhaps, scrape a bit of it into his brandy on special occasions.

"Untested and unproved substances can be dangerous," Spock cautioned, reading Kirk's thoughts. He tempered the warning with a smile.

Kirk chuckled, glancing up at Spock's amused expression.

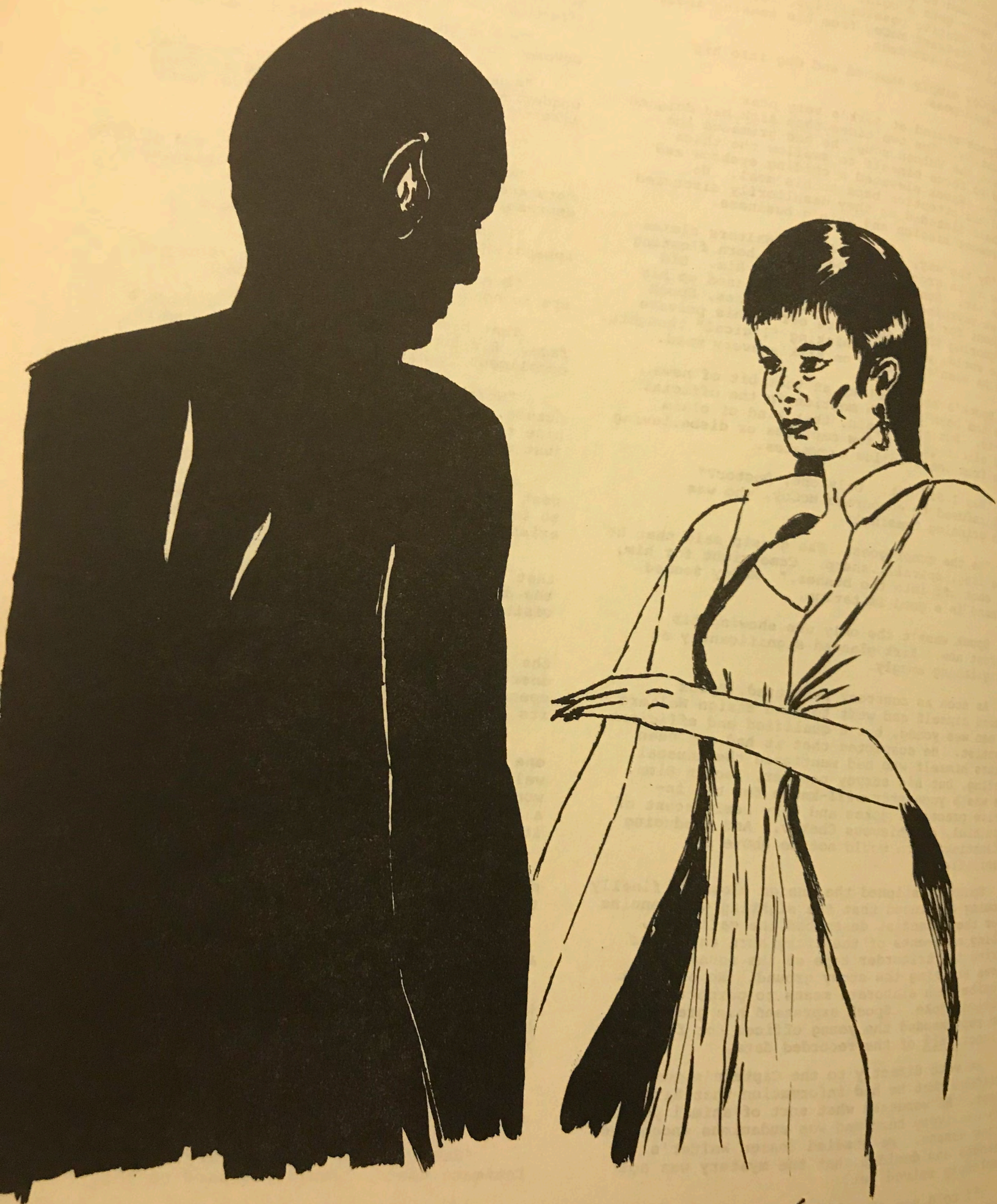
"Maybe. It's like being caught on the horns of a...dilemma. Still, we'll see. Anyway, a horn on the wall is better than one in the butt!" Kirk grinned at his verbal cleverness.

Spock elevated an eyebrow in a suggestive expression.

"Really?" he asked softly, in a deep, intimate tone. "Would you care to test?"

Kirk felt the voice run over him and shivered. He smiled delightedly and came around the desk, grabbed Spock's arm and tugged him toward the bedroom. Spock came most willingly.

They spent the night testing....



J'HERA '85

The Choice

by T'Hera Snaider

Smoldering, secret lie the embers,
Long days of hope and solitary dreams,
Until once more ancestral blood remembers
And my world crumbles into flames.

Dark lava fires now course through my brain,
All logic burned away by the glowing tide,
Leaving in the ashes lonely pain
And the seeds of a wilder, fiercer passion.

Within my head, my eyes, the searing tendrils wind,
Desires rise unbidden--there the way to madness lies;
Images of death are moving through my mind,
One by one the barriers crumble.

As in a storm I hear you call my name,
My breath is caught, my eyes, my blood on fire.
I strive to control, my sanity regain,
Yet vision dims as the mists swirl higher.

Through the blinding haze I sense your glow,
Bringing new and strange sensations:
I do not want them, that I know.
Go back to his side where you belong.

You offer life to me, this I recognize,
He gave me life and more.
I know too well where my salvation lies,
That cannot be: you are and will be his.

There are still choices to be made, you say,
Vulcan logic I chose then and do so now.
I have no choices left; death is the price I pay.
Go now, leave me my pride--I have no regrets.

Yet the force of life is strong,
Your nearness brings to fever-pitch
Feeling and emotions denied too long,
All defenses lost, I cannot nor will resist.

Desires long denied burst into passion's flower,
The distress and fierce impatience ends,
I exult in life once more for one wild hour,
Feel the pride and power of my ancient race.

Now my mind finds memories anew,
I recall the yearning glances, the tender touch.
No need to ask what I am to you,
I know now and knew then you belong to him.

I shall leave with the desert-wind at dawn of day,
We will be gone, the wind and I, before the sun is high,
I must be where it would be by evening, far away.
My sun shall set in a strange and distant sky.

LAMBERT

by John Eliot Lowell

Spock!

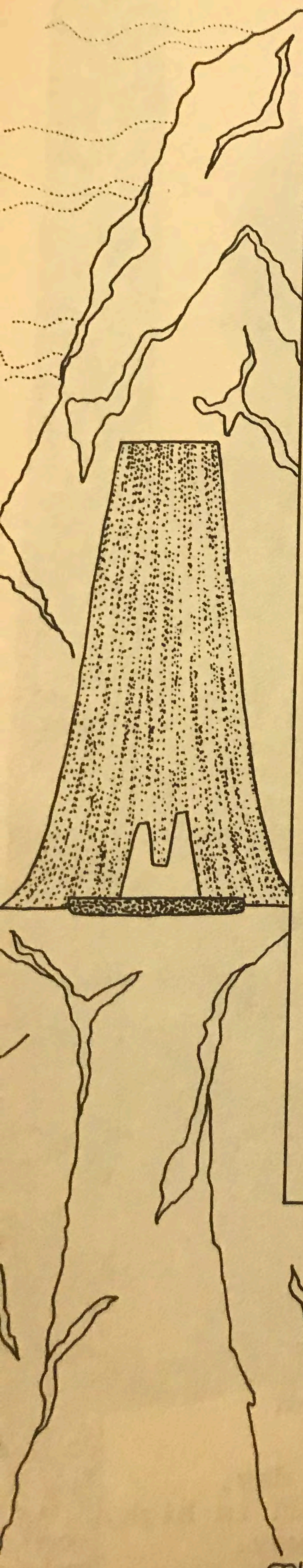
They took you from me,
Pulled you away,
Brandished one of those damned ceremonial weapons in my face,
And wouldn't let me pass.
I would have killed that guard,
Defied the whole of Vulcan to go to you,
But they stopped me, held me back, kept me from you.

Oh, Spock, they took you from me!
I could but watch as they removed your dusty black robe,
Bathed your face, tended you,
And dressed you in arid white.
It should have been my hands upon you,
Seeing to your needs, caring for you.

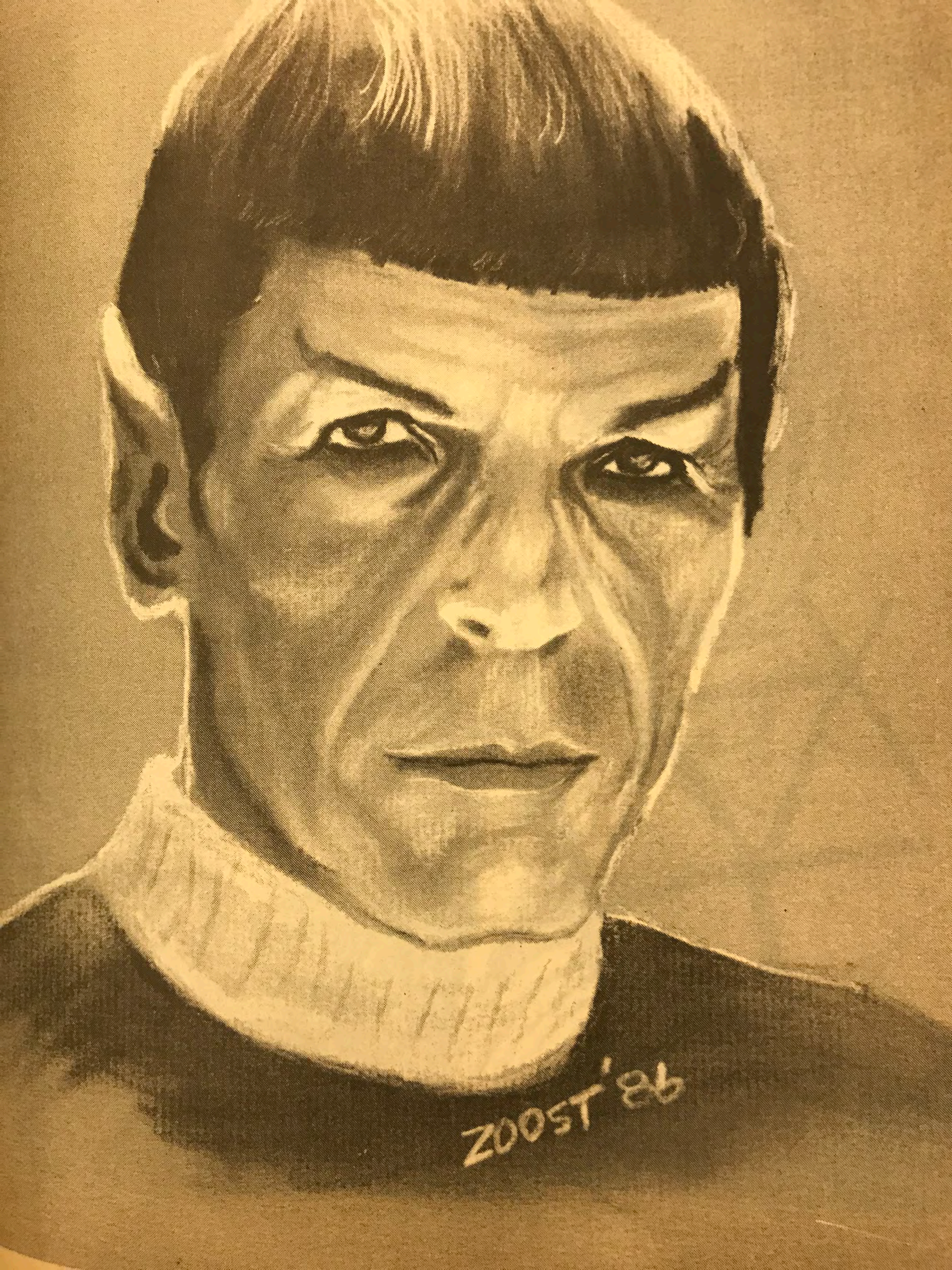
The acolytes and priestesses stood beside you
Waiting for T'Lar to arrive,
Waiting for Fal tor pann.
Oh, Spock, they wouldn't let me take my place at your side!
My soul rages within me and cries out
With helpless pain, hopeless fury.
I fought Starfleet bureaucracy and savage Klingons for you.
I wrenched you free from the Hell-planet, Genesis,
And brought you back from Death itself!
And they will not let me stand at your side.

So I stand here alone, exhausted, in pain,
Rimed with alien dust, redolent with the brimstone of Genesis,
Blood on my face, tears brimming my eyes,
Lips parted, trying desperately to control the sobs
That threaten to escape,
Trying not to shout his name aloud,
Giving voice to my anguish.
"Oh, let me go to him, my Spock, my t'hy'la",
My soul cries out.
"I am his bondmate!
Does he not own my soul, and I his?"

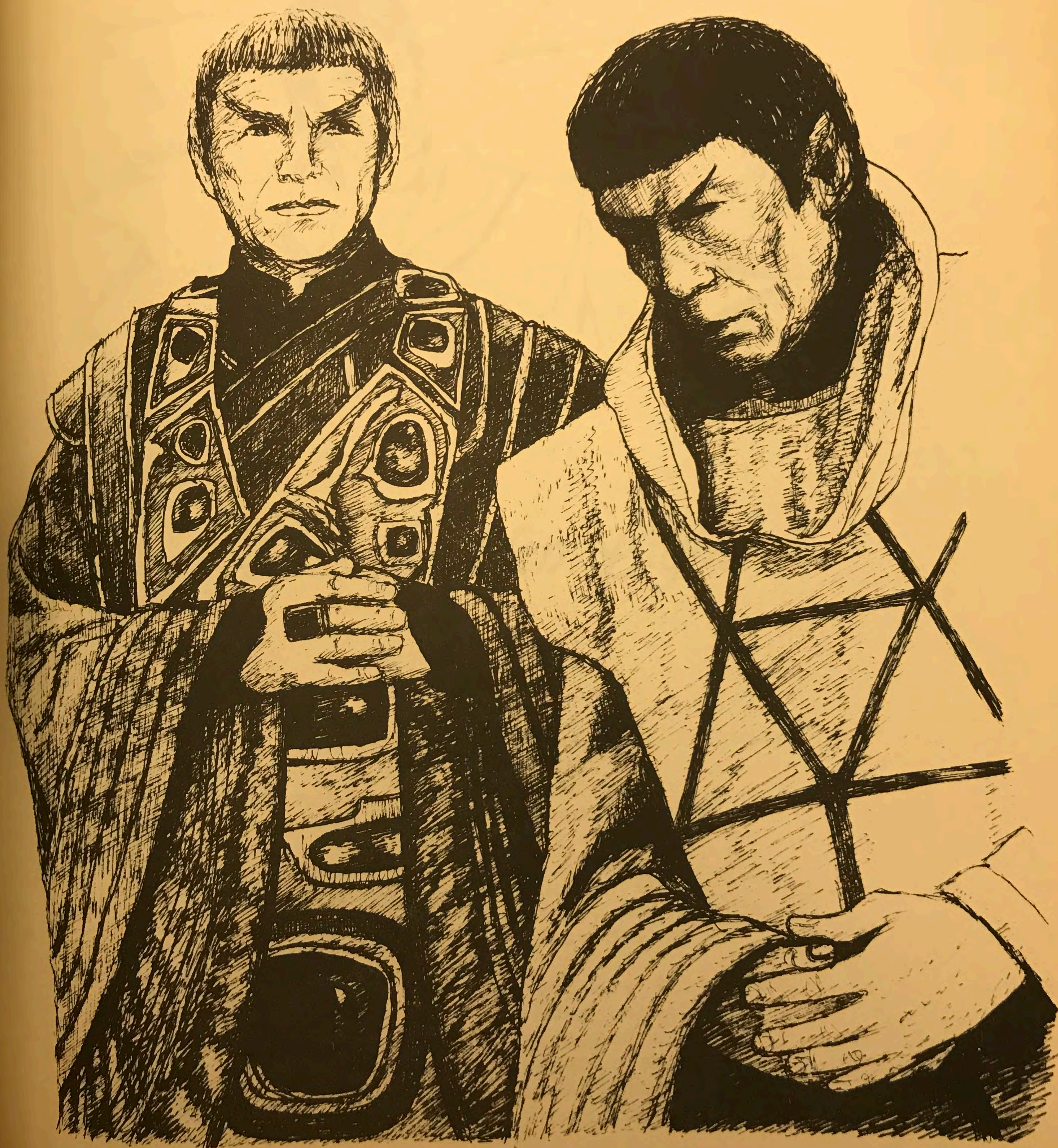
The Vulcans stand like silent sentinels
Guarding the path to eternity.
And no one answers my plea.



SAW



98 1500Z





SLW'86

This Sudden Light

by Flora Poste

I must have looked absurdly pleased, I guess:
One idiotic grin from ear to ear,
And quite unable to articulate
What I felt then, as you turned and came near.

I can't remember what it was I said.
I don't know if my words meant anything
To you. But words don't matter, not beside
Your old familiar look of questioning.

What matters, now, is that you are still you.
Even if you don't know me, even though
You do not understand why I should smile
Or stumble over words, or tremble so
Before you in this sudden breathless light:
You have returned. And day has conquered night.



Requiem & Coda

by Laurie J. Huff

I died that day. My heart, with yours, was still.
Cold space interred my soul; the stars were gone.
To stir my own stiff limbs, I had no will.
Grim duty, bier and bearer, saw me on.

Though wounds exposed to time may heal, my years
Were done; my hopes, congealed. The others wept,
But I did not; gaunt peace embalmed my tears.
Beyond all time and dreams of time, I slept.

I breathed: pure paradox. They rued my calm
Repose. They pillowed words beneath my head;
But I--unmoved by all their loving balm--
I knew: There is no comfort for the dead.

I died that day, but now am raised to light.
Your touch is life; and oh! the stars, how bright!



Dorothy Young

Limits Exist Only In the Mind

by Marcella Belton

(This story is an alternate sequel to ST III: The Search for Spock.)

Marcella Belton is an aspiring professional writer, who lives in Charleston, South Carolina. She has had several K/S stories published in other fanzines, including OUT OF BOUNDS, and KIRK ENSLAVED. All are out of print now. She is particularly adept at creating new, alien characters, and at analyzing the character of James T. Kirk, also at keeping the tension going in a long story.



It was late in the evening the day after the ceremony at Mount Seleya, where Spock's mind had been restored to him from McCoy. Sarek and Kirk sat alone in Sarek's study, the still Vulcan air crackling with tension.

"I was wrong about you, Kirk."

All traces of softness had been erased from Kirk's face by the events of the past few weeks. "Which time, Ambassador?"

Understanding that Kirk referred to a long line of affronts and partial insults directed towards him over the fifteen year span of their acquaintance, the Vulcan drew a deep breath. He respected Kirk. After all, if the Human had been a lesser man, he would probably be dead now, and certainly his son several times over. But the problem was that Kirk was Human and generations of racial prejudice was a hard thing to overcome. Besides there was the unspoken matter.

"It would seem at each of our meetings I have misjudged you, but more specifically about my son's death. When I came to you on Earth, I expected an

explanation for why you had not returned my son's katra," he hesitated, "I did not expect for you to restore him from the dead."

Kirk's face sagged into deeply ingrained worry lines, the eyes darkened with haunted pain. "I don't take any of the credit for that."

"Random factors," Sarek intoned under his breath.

Chills rippled up and down Kirk's spine at the too familiar phrase on the lips of the older Vulcan. "More than that." His voice was little more than a rasping whisper, and it spoke of pain that could not be erased.

"However, it was you that faced down the Klingons, and sacrificed your ship and your son. You paid a high price for your honor, and Vulcan will not let the virtue of your deeds go without notice."

"I did not sacrifice my son. The circumstances of his death were beyond my control. Besides," his voice cracked, "you can't lose something that you never had...but Carol...I don't know how I can face her."

"Will she blame you?"

"No and yes. It's what she's always feared the most."

Sarek drew in a deep breath. "Often it is true; what we fear the most finds its way to our hearthstone."

Realizing that the Vulcan spoke from bitter experience Kirk asked, "Spock or Amanda?"

In the shadows the Vulcan suddenly seemed smaller, and for the first time Kirk caught a glimpse of his vulnerability. "Both. I lost Spock when he was but a child, by trying to make him what he could not be. Amanda...man nor Vulcan should ever love something so much that they cannot survive its passing."

"I'm very sorry. She was a remarkable person."

Kirk shifted uneasily in the silence. Finally Sarek answered in a rough voice. "I accept your condolences."

"When Spock...died, I felt as if my world had ended," Kirk volunteered impulsively. "He was more than just a friend. It was as if part of me had been ripped away. Why was that?"

With an uncharacteristic gesture Sarek stood and paced, so that he could stare out of the window. Again the silence stretched out between them until Kirk was not sure that Sarek would answer. "You understand about bonding?"

Kirk nodded his head mutely.

Sarek did not turn back to him, but continued. "There was a bonding of sorts between you and my son--like a mind link that does not dissolve."

"It's been there for a long time," Kirk acknowledged, a tinge of awe in his voice. When Sarek didn't proceed with the explanation, he continued, "I'd come to rely on it--knew it was there, but we never said anything... like a brother."

Sarek swung around, his eyes blazing. "Not like a brother, Kirk! More than that!"

"No! Not more!" Kirk sat tensely on the edge of his chair. The Vulcan was so agitated he feared that he might have to do battle.

"Only because neither of you could accept it," the fury seemed to have died as suddenly as it had appeared, but it was replaced by a bitter coldness, "but eventually it was inevitable."

"Accept! How could we have accepted something so alien to us?"

Sarek's eyes riveted Kirk's, and the Human turned away. Alien indeed! With whom did he think he was dealing? He had allowed and encouraged Spock. If he were to be honest, he had to admit it. They had played some game and he, at least he, hadn't been fully aware of the stakes.

Kirk pulled his innate honesty around him like a cloak and lifted his eyes to meet Sarek's condemnation. "Could you have accepted it?"

Sarek didn't answer.

"Amanda?"

"If it would have made Spock happy, she would have accepted."

"Vulcan?"

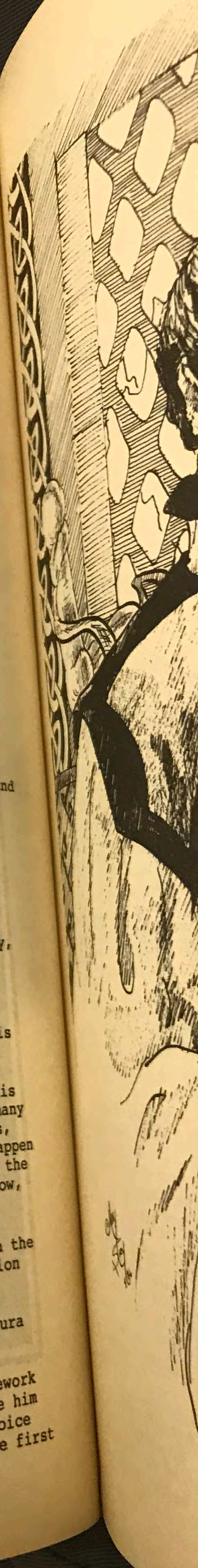
Sarek gave a negative shake of his head.

Kirk would have loved to have this interview ended, but there were too many questions, and he had to have answers, no matter how painful. "What will happen now?" He waved one hand absently in the air, and Sarek understood he meant now, after the ordeal in the temple.

"Spock will need much time with the healers. He will be kept in seclusion at the temple."

"He recognized me, but the...aura of his personality was not there."

"It might require months to rework the neurons in his brain to restore him to proper functioning." Sarek's voice was flat, and Kirk realized for the first time that he was hiding something.





"Oh, I get it," he did not even try to hide the biting sarcasm in his voice, nor the cold tingle of horror that was prickling at the back of his neck. "Spock remake! You've finally got the chance to have the son you always wanted!"

"No!" The answer was too quick, too sharp. The Vulcan did not know how to lie.

"How did you manage to keep Amanda with you all those years?" The disgust dripped from his ice-cold voice. "Did you remake her, too, or just brow-beat her to death?"

"No!" Sarek clenched his fists and turned back to the window, away from Kirk. The human flexed his knees ready for any eventuality. He'd seen Vulcans goaded beyond their reason, and he wondered why he pushed this one now. "Amanda was my heart," Sarek stated in that strangely flat tone.

"And your conscience, as well!" Kirk snapped. "She wouldn't have let you get away with what you're trying to do to Spock!"

"Spock is Vulcan! This is his home. His people!"

"Yes, a home he has avoided for almost 20 years."

Sarek turned back to Kirk. A semblance of calmness returned. "This planet is the only thing that can set him right. You gave up everything to save his life; would you deny him his sanity?"

The fight went out of Kirk like hot air out of a balloon. "No," he drew himself up from the inside, from the small pool of steel strength that made him what he was, and that never failed to fool half a galaxy of beings that could not imagine where such strength came from. "But I charge you to set him back the way he was, and not the way you and your planet would like for him to be."

Sarek shook his head sadly. "I can't guarantee the results one way or the other, but I note your charge and the right you have to make it."

Kirk lifted his chin another fraction, noting the minute change in this man: his adversary, his friend, his ally. He gave the slightest bow, "I'm going to turn in now. I suspect we haven't heard the last of this from Fleet."

"No. The Council is negotiating on your behalf at this time, but it may be that all we will be able to buy you is some time. However, Vulcan is not short on gratitude. She will extend the full mantle of protection without breaking treaty."

Kirk turned to go and Sarek stopped him. "There is one more thing, Kirk. While McCoy hosted Spock's mind, he could not have helped being influenced by it. I

am not sure of the Doctor's condition, but I suspect...complications."

"McCoy has been ill."

"The Doctor and Spock were forced together in a manner more intimate than even you have shared. Now, my son has been ripped from McCoy."

"The loss would be devastating," said Kirk.

"It is my belief that McCoy will require considerable assistance to accept this loss. We could engage a healer."

Kirk shook his head. "McCoy would just throw him out."

Sarek cleared his throat. "Whether you seduced my son, or he you, is no longer important. The damage has been done to both of you. My concern is for the Doctor. He was the unwitting victim."

Kirk glared a challenge. "McCoy is one of mine. I'll take care of him."

There was the slightest smirk on the Vulcan's face when he replied. "I don't doubt that you will."



Kirk climbed the stone steps to his room in a cold fury. He felt like a schoolboy just let out from the headmaster's office. The damn Vulcan was the most infuriating man he'd ever had to deal with, but unerringly right about most things. Kirk knew that. He could count on Sarek to keep the Fleet from his door until he could regroup, and he would be right about McCoy, too.

He stood uncertainly outside the door to McCoy's room until he heard rustling noises. He opened the door and walked in. McCoy was tossing and turning on the bed in the throes of a nightmare. Kirk didn't doubt that it was the same nightmare they both had harbored since Spock's death. He stood next to the bed and his presence seemed to have a quieting effect on the sleeping man. The pain-ravaged face of his friend stood out starkly in the half-light of the room, and Kirk's heart stood still. They had lost so much--both of them.

He sat down on the side of the bed and pulled his boots off as McCoy's body started thrashing around again. With a resigned sigh, he gathered the sweat-dampened body in his arms.

McCoy's eyes flew open and he focused on Kirk. "Jim? What?"

"You were having a nightmare?" Kirk answered in the voice of cool authority as if there was nothing unusual about his lying in bed with his CMO.

"You're damn right! Ever since this

damned thing started!" McCoy tapped his skull meaningfully.

"I know, Bones," Kirk crooned as if McCoy were a small, frightened child. "Sarek said that you might be having trouble sleeping, that's why I came in. You don't mind?"

McCoy shuddered before he leaned into the comforting embrace. "Should I?"

Kirk shrugged and gathered the tense body closer. "Damned if I know."

"It's something about that damned link, isn't it?" Kirk nodded and McCoy relaxed into the luxury of the warmth around him. "I'm...tired, Jim."

"I know. Just try to relax. I'll take care of it."

McCoy fell into a deep sleep while Kirk stayed awake taking inventory of his own pain. Cuts and bruises from his fight with the massive Klingon: they would heal. Physical exhaustion he had been harboring so long that his body couldn't remember it not being a part of him. But the deep tear in the fabric of his soul, he knew when that had started. He tasted the bitterness of defeat. Had he risked it all to save Spock, just to turn him over to a bunch of voodoo witch doctors who would make him over to order? His people! His ways! His planet! What was right? Wrong: was he so wrong? He went over it in his mind a thousand times until he succumbed to an exhausted sleep.

In the shadows in the room next to Kirk, a Romulan/Vulcan hybrid hugged her knees to her body and listened to an unfamiliar pattern singing in her blood. She listened for a long time as a tiny smile touched her austere lips. She was glad. It would be difficult, but she was glad.



When Kirk woke the next morning, the bed was empty and the Vulcan sun was marching smartly across the room. He dressed quickly and went downstairs. His crew were sitting around the table. Sarek and Saavik were absent. Kirk gave McCoy a questioning look before he served himself from the buffet. McCoy met his eyes squarely, and Kirk allowed himself a small sigh. Apparently the doctor was going to accept last night's incident without comment.

Turning his attention to other matters, Kirk asked, "Any word from the Fleet?"

Sulu's deep voice was controlled when he answered, "I believe that Sarek has been in conference all morning." Shrugging his slight shoulders, he indicated that he had no idea of their status. Kirk shoveled a few bites into his mouth.

"The Vulcans will do what they can to get you all off. I've offered my ass in a sling as a peace prize." He smiled.

"The brass will like chewing on it for a while, but they're a practical lot. As a famous old general once said, 'Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.' The space service is a little short on old heroes, especially functional ones."

But he didn't feel all that confident. Worth it, he reminded himself. Worth it all! "Where's Saavik?" he asked looking around.

"Sarek said she was meditating," Uhura volunteered.

Kirk nodded. "She's taking what happened on the planet as her fault." They all knew he meant David's death. "She may claim to be Vulcan, but she has a human's predilection for taking blame."

"I think she might have had more than a professional interest in the... situation," Uhura said.

With a sad, knowing look Kirk agreed. "I think you're right. Maybe you could have a talk with her."

"I'll try, Admiral, but, well," she shrugged, "she is Vulcan."

"Half Vulcan, Commander. Besides, you never let that stop you from putting the screws to Spock when he needed it." Kirk turned to Scotty. "Have you had a chance to work on the BIRD?"

"Aye, sir. I'm having trouble with spare parts. Those Klingons traveled mighty lean, but I've got some dandy young Vulcans from the Academy that are enjoying my course in advanced jury-rigging."

A grin creased Kirk's tired face. "Keep at it, Scotty. If negotiations fail we might need something for a quick getaway."

"Not to worry, sir. I'll have that sleek-winged beauty ready for you. She's not as pretty as our silver lady, but she's got lots of spunk."

Sarek appeared in the doorway. "Klingon ships are indiscriminately addressed as 'he'."

Five heads swiveled in surprise. Scotty found his mouth first. "Agghh, sir, but a ship is a 'she'."

"Whatever." The Vulcan's tone was foreboding. "I suggest that you redouble your efforts to make the ship ready. The Admiral is correct. The Federation is in no mood for plea bargaining."

"You followed my instructions?" Kirk asked in a tight voice.

"I offered you on a platter, Admiral, but they are not to be deterred. They have taken your rebellion quite seriously."

Kirk closed his eyes a second. He

felt enormously tired, others he whispered, sir." Chekov spoke fi

"Ah, Chekov, you career ahead of you. All of you, so much."

"If the Fleet w Admiral," said Sulu, some use for us." Kirk shook his

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"I hope you wil few years from now w water planet at the countered Kirk.

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"Lt. Saavik on Vulcan. Since charges I have a sanctuary of Spo all, an heir by

Kirk listen said, but there "Right! I wante can salvage some Fleet. He was v

"Indeed."

In Kirk's

felt enormously tired. Looking up at the others he whispered, "I'm sorry."

Chekov spoke first. "It was worth it, sir."

"Ah, Chekov, you had such a splendid career ahead of you." He looked around. "All of you, so much to offer."

"If the Fleet wants to waste us, Admiral," said Sulu, "I'm sure you will have some use for us."

Kirk shook his head. "Sulu, your command."

The oriental managed a tight grin. "Let them stick it in their ear. I know we did the right thing."

"I hope you will be able to say that a few years from now when we're on some back-water planet at the hindend of the galaxy," countered Kirk.

"Your friends are a credit to you and to my son," said Sarek. "Vulcan shall not forget what you have done, nor will I. You will need to leave as soon as possible. Only know that I will not abandon the fight to clear you as long as I draw breath."

As the rest hurried off to make the last minute preparations for what looked to be a very long and desperate voyage, Kirk stayed behind to talk with Sarek.

"They are sending the **Excalibur** to arrest you."

"That cuts down on our time."

"I suggest you leave before the sun goes down. It would not be good to spill Federation blood."

"Don't worry. We'll be gone. I... I'd like to somehow be kept informed about Spock."

"I assure you when Spock recovers, you will know."

Kirk tapped his head. "The link?"

"It is doubtful that that will survive, but I have not forgotten that I owe you a debt." The Vulcan's face had never been more closed, but he went right to another subject, not giving Kirk a chance to challenge him.

"Lt. Saavik has elected to stay here on Vulcan. Since she is innocent of any charges I have agreed to give her the sanctuary of Spock's home. She is, after all, an heir by adoption."

Kirk listened for what was not being said, but there was too much on his mind. "Right! I wanted her to stay. Glad we can salvage something of Spock's for the Fleet. He was very proud of his prodigy."

"Indeed."

In Kirk's mind there was something

wrong, but he had a million things to do and less than ten hours to do them in.



Late that afternoon while Kirk was going over a preflight check with Scotty and Chekov, a Vulcan came aboard with a message from Sarek. Annoyed at being interrupted, but sure it must be important, Kirk pushed the hair back out of his face with a tired sigh and said, "Can you handle it, Scotty? We need to be able to lift off in a couple of hours."

"Aye," Scotty replied without looking up from his list.

Kirk followed the man to a waiting car. His interest picked up as he realized that they were heading out of town towards the temple. By the time he was ushered into a small meditation room, his heart was slamming against his ribs. There was no mistaking the tall, robed figure that waited for him.

"Spock!" The single syllable was filled with excitement and dread.

"Jim," the deep voice answered. The Vulcan stepped forward and clasped Kirk's hand in both of his. Kirk almost withdrew in a selfconscious reflex, but instead he stepped into the Vulcan and clasped him in an awkward embrace. Still, the hot breath on his neck startled him.

Kirk allowed the intimacy for a while before gently pulling away. He did not know this Spock. Didn't know how to respond to him. He looked into the fawn-like eyes, and knew that the wrong move could destroy the fragile, newly-forming personality before him.

"How are you, Spock?"

The uncertain, negative shake of the dark head tore at Kirk. This was Spock, but there was something different about the set of the shoulders, the sharp planes of the face. Something indefinable about the eyes. The face, the body looked right; but the eyes were different--young, open, not guarded--yet there was a thousand years of experience in those eyes. Life and death. His own, others, a whole planet.

"I feel...many things, Jim. It is very difficult. My intellect tells me that I should not feel, but...I do."

"McCoy would be pleased. He's been trying to get that confession out of you for years." Kirk smiled but his heart was breaking. Standing this close to the Vulcan, he could feel the old tug of the link, but it was on fire with uncertainty.

"McCoy," Spock mouthed the name uncertainly. Then touched his head at the temple. "He is up here, too. The healers say I must cast that part out, but...I cannot bring myself to part with him."

"Shit!" Kirk leaned fractionally closer to the Vulcan, this time putting both arms around him. They stood locked together for a long time. It was Spock that pulled back just far enough to look into the Human's upturned face.

"My father tells me that you are leaving Vulcan."

Kirk cleared his aching throat and stepped back. It was uncomfortable to be that close to the Vulcan. "Yeah, the Federation is a little unhappy with us right now. We're going to give them some time to think about it."

"I...I would like to go with you. That is why I asked for you to come here."

Kirk looked into the ancient, child-like face. "Spock, right now your job is to stay here and get well. I'd love to have you with me, but...not just yet."

The Vulcan grasped Kirk's upper arms in an iron grip. "I need to be with you. If I stay here, they will fix me back THEIR way."

"These are your people, Spock." Kirk twisted his arm in the painfully tight grip, but did not dislodge the Vulcan. "They know what's best for you. Besides, I don't know what's out there for us."

"You have given up everything that you value...for me." The deep voice, always so sure before, quivered with uncertainty. "Would you abandon me to be stuffed into their iron mold...again?"

Kirk's mind flooded with the thousand events that made their friendship what it was. He understood what they were trying to do to Spock, and apparently this time Spock didn't want it. He looked at the man he had relied on so many times and saw a vulnerability that he never would have expected.

"Maybe you're right, but I'm afraid to jeopardize you when you're..." he hesitated to put Spock's condition into words, "not well."

"I trust you, Jim." The simple statement was sincere, full of faith.

"What about your father?" Kirk asked, though it was perfectly obvious that he had no choice. Spock needed something from him; maybe for the first time in all their years together had asked something of him. Kirk shrugged in good-natured defeat. "What am I going to do; just walk out of here with you?"

Spock's solemn expression cracked with an uncertain smile. "We've broken out of worse places, I believe." He drew a deep breath. "It was my father who arranged to have you come here."

"Oh," Kirk grinned. "In that case are you ready?"

"I am," Spock said solemnly as he produced a slimline phaser from the folds of his robe. At the look on Kirk's face he said, "The priests would undoubtedly object if they felt that you were interfering with their sworn duties. I abhor the violence, but condone the necessity."

"Where did you get that?" Kirk asked as Spock pulled off his robe to reveal a more practical traveling suit.

The Vulcan gave him a look that reminded Kirk of the old Spock. "My father."

"Okay, let's go."

By the time they got back to the BIRD, Scotty was revving up the engines. No one showed surprise when Kirk and Spock came on board, though McCoy was conspicuously absent from the bridge.

"Sarek called and told me to be ready to lift off as soon as you got here," Scotty reported. "The Excalibur has entered Vulcan airspace."

Kirk stepped up to the command seat, and studied the boards a second before giving orders. Spock hung back looking confused, and ill.

"We are receiving a message from the Excalibur not to lift off on pain of death," said Uhura.

"That's a bit strong," Kirk commented in the deceptively mild voice he used when things got the toughest.

"We'll never outrun them, sir," said Scotty.

Kirk glanced over at the unmistakable tinge of smugness in the voice. "What do you have for us, Commander?"

"Sarek advised us of an uncharted anomaly that apparently travels in tandem with their sun. It's rumored that certain historical figures have disappeared into this region over the years for, uh, one reason or another."

Kirk glanced over to Spock for confirmation, but the Vulcan was taking on a glassy-eyed stare that Kirk didn't have time to pursue.

"Can we make it?" Kirk asked Scotty.

"I dinna know, but we'll give it all we've got."

"Best you do, Scotty, or I'm afraid we won't even get the opportunity for a vacation at a penal colony. I get the impression that the Excalibur has her phasers warmed up."

Small in comparison to the Enterprise, the BIRD responded like a thoroughbred. Racing toward the red giant sun, they all had private thoughts. They all had risked everything for their friends. Now they took the final gamble. When they made



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it, if they made it, what would they find on the other side of the anomaly?

Kirk shifted tensely in his chair as he stared at the small screen. He couldn't see anything, but the hairs were standing up on the back of his neck. She was out there.

"Cloaking device," he ordered in a calm voice.

"We're going to need all our power to get around this devil," said Scotty as he glanced anxiously at the approaching star.

"Engage cloaking device, Mister Scott."

"Aye."

"Excalibur at far range of our sensors," reported Sulu. "She's gaining on us," he added unnecessarily.

Kirk leaned forward, peering into his small screen as if willing the larger, powerful ship back.

"Their sensors have the power to detect us even with the cloaking device," said Chekov.

"If they know where to look. Sulu, course change, thirty, fifty mark five."

"Aye, sir."

"That's putting us high in the arc." Scotty voiced his concern. "It may not be possible to hold."

The idea was to place themselves in an uncomfortably close, very fast orbit around the blazing red giant; then by applying thrust at the precise second to shoot off in another direction. It was like jumping off a high speed train going over a mountain pass. The correct timing would take you where you wanted to go--for them, into the anomaly--but the wrong timing, well, that's what captains were for: to tell them "when".

"Calculated risk, Scotty, but the Excalibur won't be looking for us to take such a risk, either."

As they got closer to the Vulcan sun, heat and pressure began to build in the small ship, and they were wildly buffeted by sudden turbulences. A stifled gasp over his shoulder caused Kirk to turn and look at Spock who had taken on a green, ashen look.

"Better strap in, Spock. This is likely to get rough."

When the Vulcan didn't respond, Kirk jumped up and strapped him into a spare seat. He didn't have time for a sick Vulcan now.

"Gravitational pull at calculated maximum, sir." Sulu warned as Kirk hurried back to the command chair.

It would have been easier with Spock

beside him to make the necessary calculations, but the Vulcan was clutching his chair and moaning like a kid on a wild ride at the fair. So Kirk made the calculations, and Scotty monitored the shaky engines, while Sulu piloted the Klingon ship.

If there had been time for sightseeing, the view was spectacular as they careened around the blazing star. Wild jets of flame licked up at their tiny ship as explosions tens of thousands of times larger than any thermonuclear weapon flared from the star's surface, but the BIRD flew true.

"Not a bad machine," Kirk commented to no one in particular. "We need to get ready to put on the brakes," he ordered as he studied the navigational figures. He said a silent prayer that he had figured right. He glanced back to Spock, but the Vulcan no longer even moaned. "Now," he cried, clutching his chair as Scotty threw the switch for reverse thrusters.

The tiny ship did not have nearly enough power to stop their catapulting charge, but the thrusters did tip the balance enough to check their headlong flight. The tiny ship bucked. Stressed metal screamed in protest as laws of physics and gravity battled for their very atoms. The build-up of the heat from their close passage to the sun was intolerable. The compressed air became cloying with the smell of fear and sweat. For a second, as the ship creaked and groaned, it seemed like the walls would collapse on them, crushing the life out of them. Then suddenly the pressure shifted, and the ship rose and rose. Ten, fifteen, thirty, sixty degrees and then over.

"Damn," Kirk cursed as he watched helplessly while Scotty and Sulu fought the controls and disorientation. But the ship, like the well-crafted machine she was, continued her roll until she righted herself and stabilized.

"Where the Hell are we?" asked Kirk.

With a look of absolute glee, Scotty answered, "Smack in the middle of the anomaly, sir. We made it!"

Wiping sweat from his forehead, Kirk smiled. "Hold her steady. We're on our way," he shrugged, "I'm not exactly sure where."

After a while, as the ride got smoother, Kirk buzzed for McCoy. "Got a patient up here for you."

When McCoy came on the bridge, he gave the screen a quick check even as he started going over the Vulcan. "Where the Hell are we, Jim?"

"My question, Bones. Don't have the foggiest. We're essentially on the other side of Vulcan's sun, but nothing fits the charts." Kirk answered without looking back. "How is he?"

"Don't know yet. I'll have to get him into that cubicle they called sickbay."

"Uh huh," Kirk turned his attention back to the sensors. "Keep a sharp look out. I don't expect Excalibur to try to follow us, but let's not take any chances. Also, if refugees came into this area, we don't want to run afoul of them without any warning. Anyone with balls enough to take that ride, and reason enough, bears watching."

"I'm surprised that Sarek would send his son into such a dangerous area," said Uhura with a puzzled expression on her face.

Kirk continued studying the screen without answering, but his mind was busy with a thousand possibilities. Maybe not, but then maybe so. What would a Vulcan do if his offspring turned out to be such a bitter disappointment that he could jeopardize all of Vulcan's principles? Spock was a prince, but such a controversial one that it might serve Vulcan best if he simply disappeared. It was not a comforting thought as the Human studied the murky, violent space that they were attempting to negotiate.

They rode unpredictable solar currents, fighting brief, turbulent magnetic storms for several hours. Slowly the skies thinned and the going got smoother. They finally broke out of the swirling mists to find clear space and no bearings.

"What do you suggest, sir?" Sulu asked.

"Best guess, Captain. Look for anything."

McCoy's voice came over the tinny-sounding intercom. "Jim, can you get down here?"

"Now, Bones?"

"Yes, now! Our...patient is having a bad time."

Kirk glanced over to Scotty.

"You go on, sir. We'll keep a sharp watch."

Kirk got up reluctantly. He dreaded this. He had been thankful for the action that had kept him from McCoy. Now he had to face the Doctor and the Vulcan. Fear and guilt gripped him. He'd rather face down a shipload of Klingons than try to set this mess straight. He walked into the cubby and found Spock rolling on the bunk clutching his skull. One look at McCoy showed that the doctor was still so tied to the Vulcan that he could not even function. Kirk crossed over and grabbed Spock by the shoulders.

"What's happening?" He demanded, not directing his question to either of them.

"It is an attack on my nervous system," Spock gasped. "A result of what happened to me on the Genesis planet."

Kirk's blood froze. "Are you aging?"

"No," McCoy answered in a tight voice. "It's not aging. It's more like psychic shock. A reaction to having his psyche ripped apart and not properly put back together."

Kirk didn't understand it fully, but then he never really understood Vulcan mind things. He only knew that they were sometimes useful, but more often they could be a complete pain in the ass, usually for Spock who, though he was only half Vulcan, managed to pay a triple price for almost any benefit of his Vulcan heritage. Kirk shook his head; he doubted it was worth the price tag. Intuitively though, he knew that Spock was still tied to his re-creation and thereby to the destruction of the Genesis planet. Goddamn it if he had let his love for this man outweigh his good judgement! Vulcan held the key for his friend's sanity, but Vulcan was receding in the murky space at an alarming rate.

"Spock! Spock!" Kirk shouted, trying to break through the pain-crazed fog into which Spock was sinking. "Do we need to take you back? I'll do it! I'll go back if that's what you need!"

"No, Captain," Spock's voice, sharp with unhidden pain, ripped at Kirk's heart. "To go back is to admit defeat. I do not want to become what they want."

Holding the trembling Vulcan in his arms, Kirk shot a questioning look to McCoy. "How much of this can he take?"

"I'm not sure, Jim,...not sure how much I can take."

Kirk had almost forgotten that the two were inexorably tied together. "Why do you feel his pain? Why wasn't the link dissolved when his consciousness was returned to him?"

Spock broke through his pain to answer. "It is something that will never be dissolved until I die, my physical body, that is. When I gave him my katra, I did not know...could not realize that I would be resurrected. I would not have...would never have subjected him, my friend, to this agony if I had known."

"No, of course not. It wasn't your fault," Kirk whispered, pulling the unresisting body to his chest.

"You pointy-eared bastard," McCoy sputtered. "I don't care. It's worth it just to see you alive. I just need a little help to handle it." He looked at Kirk with misery in his eyes and a longing that Kirk wanted to deny. "Need to know how to handle it, that's all!"

Spock couldn't or didn't answer. He simply leaned into Kirk with his eyes clenched tightly closed, but his breath did come a

little easier. That
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McCoy said rubbing
chair in the room.
Kirk sat holdin
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little easier. Kirk inched himself back on the bunk so that his back was against the wall and pulled the Vulcan into a more comfortable position.

"Your presence seems to soothe him," McCoy said rubbing his own forehead and lowering his tall, thin frame into the only chair in the room.

Kirk sat holding the bone-thin Vulcan in his arms. Rubbing up and down the tense back until the ragged breathing fell into the labored regularity of sleep. Slowly, Kirk untangled himself and got up. He had to get back to the bridge.

He lay a hand on McCoy's shoulder, acknowledging without a word the pain that he knew his friend bore for both of them. "Call me if you need me."

A grim smile was all the answer he got.

On his way to the bridge, he could hear the page. "Admiral to the bridge! Admiral to the bridge!" Chekov's voice was edged with worry. He rushed through the doors to see that all Hell was about to break loose. Ranging before them on the screen was the most motley, and he had little doubt, most dangerous assortment of ships he had ever seen.

"Have you made contact with them, Uhura?"

"Yes, sir. They are ordering us to surrender."

Scotty handed him a quick assessment of their firepower. "There are a lot of them, sir, but the weaponry is quite crude."

Kirk scratched his chin and wrung his hands. "True, but a lucky shot...." He didn't finish the sentence. "Patch me through to them, Commander."

"Their leader, Quanaang, on screen, sir."

"Hailing alien vessel. We order you to stand down your weapons and prepare to be taken into tow!"

Kirk admired the man for his bravado, not to mention his fierce bearing. He was of undetermined origin, powerful and brash with an underlying brutishness that promised no quarter.

"This is James T. Kirk, commanding officer. We come seeking sanctuary. We mean you no harm."

"Well, we certainly mean you no harm," the alien returned glibly. "We offer you sanctuary. Stand down your arms. I will send a crew to pilot you to a safe place."

Kirk signaled to cut the transmission and leaned back in his seat. "Well, friends, I think we've met the enemy."

"Aye, we should've stayed on the other side."

"I think we might have some bargaining power, yet," said Kirk, as he leaned forward in his chair, his eyes shining with anticipation of the confrontation. "On screen."

The screen lit up showing the powerful alien full-figure. The man was even more impressive against the backdrop of his mixed crew. A tall, dark-haired, lanky fellow of probable Romulan descent stood at his shoulder. There was some quality about the Romulan that made Kirk's pulse race. Something about the carved face, the tawny eyes that promised to come through the screen, and space itself, to protect the man he stood behind. These were dangerous men. The big one simply because of his sheer power and the look of one who had never been defeated. The Romulan because of his obsession to protect. Kirk had seen that look before-- somewhere! He couldn't identify it at the moment.

"We'll be happy to follow you to this haven. But I'm not prepared to accept boarders."

There was a skimpily-veiled threat in the response. The alien laughed. "You think I am a fool to lead an armed ship to my sanctuary?!"

"You think I am fool enough to unarm myself in the presence of strangers?" Kirk shot back.

The man gave Kirk a shrewd look. "No fool, I am certain. But you have nowhere else to go. If you want sanctuary, you must play by my rules."

"I warn you. Your ships are old. We could easily defeat you."

To make his point Kirk executed a quick evasive maneuver, activated the cloaking device, layed down a barrage of fire that would have destroyed several of the older ships, and just as quickly reappeared well out of the calculated range of the enemy.

When communications were reestablished, Quanaang had the grace to look impressed, but he answered simply. "You could not defeat us all, and still you have nowhere else to go. You would not be here if you were welcome anywhere else."

Armed with his most charming grin, Kirk answered, "I'd say we have an impasse in that case. It is not our desire to inflict any damage; yet, I would need assurance before I put my ship and crew in your hands. I judge that you are a leader who understands responsibilities."

Quanaang held up his clenched fist in warrior's salute. "I understand responsibility and judgment. On my honor I offer you safe passage and guesting in my home."

Kirk returned the salute. "I accept guesting privileges, as do my crew."

"Good. Follow me."

"Lead on."

Kirk cut the transmission and looked around at his crew. "Looks like things could get pretty tough." He singled Uhura out with his eyes. "Not much of a place for ladies."

She gave him a level gaze. "When have I not carried my own weight, Admiral?"

He bowed his head in acknowledgment of her spirit.

With more than a small reservation about the outcome, they followed the small, ragtag fleet.

"I don't recognize a single ship. What about you, Scotty?"

"No, sir. I'd guess that most of those models are in excess of a hundred years old with all sorts of modifications. That one flanking us looks like a real hotrod. Probably made up of at least three other ships."

"You have to give them credit for ingenuity," said Uhura.

The journey to Haven, the name of their destination, took several ship days. Kirk realized that was because of the slow speed at which they were traveling, but he also suspected that they were not taking the most direct route.

"Try to keep account of our course, Sulu."

"I am, sir, but the gyros are all out because of the magnetic fluxes, and there's nothing in this space to get a fix on."

Kirk rubbed his chin as he studied the screen. He knew he was being led deeper and deeper into unknown territory, possibly a trap regardless of Quanaang's pledge, and he quite honestly doubted that he could get out on his own.

"This space seems to be almost closed, Admiral." Scotty ventured. "It's as though when we came through that anomaly we entered," he shrugged for lack of proper words, "a closed universe."

"I see that, Scotty. You would expect for there to be just more space, but it's like we're in a giant box." He hoped the worry wasn't creeping into his voice, but these were level-headed people. Not likely to panic. Yet, he felt slightly on the edge of panic, and couldn't put his finger on why. He heaved himself tiredly out of the chair. "I'm going to check on Spock and McCoy. I won't be long. Then I want you to get some rest."

"I'm all right, sir." Scotty answered, but Kirk could see the fatigue lines in his face.

"Please don't go Vulcan on me, Commander. One is about all I can handle!" Kirk teased, but the truth was too close

to the surface. His worry about Spock was eating away at him.

"Aye, sir, 'n I think you could stand some rest y'self. Begging your pardon, sir."

Kirk left with a grin on his face, but it was true. He could feel it in his bones. He was tired to the core, and there was no rest in sight. He sucked in his breath before going into the room with his two friends. They'd all been through twenty versions of Hell, and there was no end in sight.

Spock lay quietly on the bunk, his face drawn with the effort of existing with the forces tearing through his mind. McCoy looked no better. Kirk ruffled the Doctor's hair as he passed, and sat on the narrow bunk beside the Vulcan.

"Feeling any better?"

Spock rolled over on his side, burying his face against Kirk's leg. He stayed that way for several long seconds, breathing raggedly as if trying to draw some of the essence of Kirk into his lungs. Still nervous and unsure about how to respond, Kirk momentarily froze. He could feel, actually feel, the effort of withdrawal in the Vulcan.

"Damn," he whispered, and with the briefest of shrugs, not daring to look back at McCoy, he gathered the unresisting body into his arms, like he had done everytime he had come. He allowed the Vulcan to cling to him. There was nothing sexual about the caress. Spock was more like a child snuggling into the arms of a parent, except that he couldn't seem to get close enough. He needed Kirk like a man dying of thirst needs water, and he drank from Kirk, absorbing energy through his very pores.

They sat like that for as long as Kirk could stand it, probably less than ten minutes, then Kirk gently untangled himself. With a stroke, he smoothed the sweat-dampened hair back from the Vulcan's forehead.

"I'll be back," he promised, swaying dizzily as he stood.

"I...I'm sorry, Jim."

"Don't be," Kirk leaned down and kissed the man on the cheek. It seemed such a natural thing to do. Like kissing a child good night.

He noticed as he left that McCoy had fallen into a fitful doze. He bent down and kissed the top of the Doctor's head as well.

When they reached Haven, it proved to be a small, red planet--a miserable replica of Vulcan, though a little cooler. There was one small settlement of about a thousand people. The predominant race was Vulcan/Romulan, with a smattering of some in-

fluence that Kirk could not identify. There was one group with an average height of seven feet with a rangy, heavy build, and dark haired with shockingly blue eyes. This was the group that Quanaang belonged to, though he seemed to be the leader of all.

Leaving the BIRD in orbit, Kirk beamed down accompanied by Sulu and Chekov. The beaming process completely amazed the inhabitants. The fact that Kirk came with only two men was equally impressive.

They were greeted by about twenty men, the majority from Quanaang's group. When they materialized, they held up their arms to show that they were unarmed.

"I must apologize if I seem inhospitable," Quanaang said in a booming, jovial voice as his men stepped forward to search the visitors. "You understand that your little stunt at our meeting has impressed as well as unnerved some of my people," he continued as he inspected Kirk's communicator with obvious curiosity.

"If I don't check in with my people they are likely to do something embarrassing," Kirk responded in a mild voice.

Quanaang switched his assessment from the mechanical device to the Humans standing before him. Kirk stood easily for the visual inspection. In his years as a diplomat for the Fleet, he had learned that his open, self-assured front seldom failed to win him points. If this was to be a war of wits, man (or alien) to man, Kirk knew he had a good chance. If it were a matter of physical strength, well, he had fought giants before.

When his scrutiny, which would have had most men cringing and begging for quarter, did not have the desired effect, Quanaang said in a sneering tone, "I expected you to be bigger."

With a disarming grin, Kirk answered, "I hoped you weren't as big as you looked on screen."

The alien face broke into a wide grin. "I like you, Kirk! You will make an impressive ally. Come into my home and have refreshments."

Kirk followed his host, flanked by Sulu and Chekov. Quanaang left all but two of his men outside in the courtyard.

The house was spacious, made of roughly-hewn stones, obviously one raw material they had in abundance. The furnishings were stone with woven reed and cane fittings. Though there was a distinct lack of decorative items, the surroundings were comfortable without seeming austere.

"There is some division of opinion as to what to do with you, Kirk." Quanaang came right to the point as they were served. "Some do not trust one who comes from the other side with such impressive armament. It has been a long

time since anyone has come from the other side."

"I suppose that our motivations were similar. I'm one step ahead of my authorities, and as you have already put it, we have nowhere else to go."

"For most things there is a price."

"I don't have much to offer," Kirk said with disarming honesty. "The man that recommended that we come here did supply us with an interesting cargo, however."

"What man sent you here?"

"A Vulcan, Sarek, of the first family of Vulcan."

Quanaang's face lit up. "I know this man. He was but a boy when it became necessary for me to come here. His father was the man that helped me."

Kirk sat forward not quite believing his luck, but needing very much for it to be so. "I have his son with me. On my ship. He is very ill. Do you have healers?"

"We have no healers, but there is an old Romulan woman who tends us. Bring down the son of Sarek, and I will pledge all my resources to his care."

Kirk took a deep breath. Could he trust this man? But then, what choice did he have? He had to get some help for Spock and McCoy. "My communicator, please."

He buzzed the ship. "Scotty, have Spock and McCoy beamed down."

"Aye, sir. It will take me a while to get them to the transporter room."

"Oh, and Scotty, send down a case of that stuff Sarek sent along. Let's see what we've got."

"Aye, sir."

Kirk relaxed back into his woven chair. It was done. One way or another he was committed. "I don't recognize your race, Quanaang. Where are your people from?"

The man's eyes took on a pained, far away look. "My people no longer exist, Kirk. Only the ones you see here. My home was a lush, green world, called Sweet Waters, located on the outer borders of the Romulan Empire. My people were not as advanced as our neighbors. Though we were fierce warriors, we fell before our Romulan cousins. They took no prisoners. A few of us from the royal family were kept as hostages and slaves as my people were exterminated. I was very young then. The youngest of my father's sons.

"A young Romulan prince took pity on us, and managed to escape with a dozen of my people. He took us to Vulcan. At the time, Romulans were at war with peoples

called the Federation. The Vulcans were neutral and could not help us openly, but certain of them sent us here.

"When I got to this place, I hated Romulans, for they had killed my people. But one had shown mercy and had given up everything to save a few of us. I also hated Vulcans for they would not come against the murderers of my people, but again some had risked even their own planet to help us. So when I found that I had been brought to a place where Romulans and Vulcans lived side by side and did not kill, I decided that I could do no less. I am now the leader of this place and I welcome you.

"If you are an honorable man, you will do well. If you flee to this place because you have done dishonor in your own land, you will not be welcome."

Hearing the transporter whine, Kirk got up to go outside, surprising himself by answering, "My only crime was loving too well." He stepped forward just in time to help an exhausted McCoy support Spock.

Quanaang shouldered them both aside and lifted the Vulcan like a child in his arms. "I will carry the son of Sarek."

While waiting for the healing woman to come, the men opened the crate of things from Sarek. Quanaang looked on in appreciation at the thoughtful collection of raw material and gadgets that the Vulcan had sent. He held up a small generator.

"Ahh, gold and jewels have no value, and paper currency is used for toilet paper, but a wise man brings wise gifts." He turned to Kirk with a gleam in his eye. "Do you have women?"

Kirk thought about Uhura. He knew that eventually he would have to show her. "I have a woman," he said.

Quanaang looked disappointed. "Only one. Is she bound to you, or would you consider trading for her? Women have not fared well on this world, and are highly valued."

"She is bound to me," Kirk lied.

"A pity. Would you consider breeding her? I have three sons to stud. You could take your pick. You could even keep the child. It would entitle you to one third of my goods, and my influence at warrior's council."

"You haven't even seen her," Kirk could not hide his amazement.

"You, Kirk, would not have a woman not fit to breed."

"No, I guess I wouldn't," Kirk said with a trace of inner amusement. "But we have just recently been joined. I wouldn't consider loaning her out."

"You have no children?"

Kirk lowered his head. "I had a son," he said and the bitterness in his voice was not lost on the perceptive alien. "He was killed."

Quanaang raised his fist in salute. "Your grief is mine."

"Thank you."

The alien sat back in his chair. "You only had one son. That is amazing."

"Conditions in my world are different from here. There are many people and no pressure to have children. I...thought I had plenty of time."

"Perhaps," Quanaang said in the shrewd tone of a horse trader, "if you do not wish to breed your woman, you would not mind siring a child on my get. I have one daughter, a virgin, who will come into season very soon. I would be honored to have you lie with her."

"Whoaa! Now wait a minute, Quanaang. I am honored that you would consider me, but, well, it's just not our custom."

Quanaang waved his hand impatiently. "Your customs are back there on the other side. A place you will never see again. This is a new existence. If you ally yourself with my family by mixing your blood with the blood of my get, we will form a great alliance."

The man leaned his broad, rugged face close to Kirk. "Do not fool yourself, Kirk! There are enemies here. Those that would not have strangers in their Haven. Cast your lot with me and we will both be too powerful to challenge."

Kirk inclined his head to the big man. "Let me see to my sick friend first, and the safety of my crew, then we will talk more of this."

The man laughed expansively and slapped Kirk mightily on the shoulder. Just then the tall, lanky Romulan Kirk had noticed on the ship came in with an old crone.

"This is my Romulan friend of whom I have spoken. Meador, this is Kirk."

The Romulan crossed over and embraced Quanaang before stepping back and giving a salute to Kirk. Again it was the eyes that said everything. A relationship explained, a gauntlet thrown down. "I have brought the healing woman, though if your Vulcan is very sick, I can offer little hope."

"His problem is mostly of a psychic nature. He has recently suffered severe trauma."

The Romulan, who Kirk judged to be close to 150 years old--a little past Romulan middle-age--shook his head. "She is good with broken bones and fevers. I don't know about things of the mind, especially Vulcan minds."



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They went into a small, dark room where Spock was being kept. The old woman leaned over him, one gnarled hand over his heart, while the other one searched for pressure points on his face. When Kirk entered the room, Spock moaned like a sick kitten and leaned towards him, as a plant seeking light.

The woman opened ancient eyes to look at Kirk, then lapsed back into a trance. Afraid to interfere, Kirk inched closer to McCoy, who looked ready to drop.

After several minutes, the woman broke the meld with a sharp jerk. She got up from the floor and walked out of the room. Once outside she cried in a shrill voice. "Where is the Kirk?"

Jim stepped forward, his heart slamming in his chest with dread. "I am Kirk."

"I cannot help your friend. Only you can quench the raging storm in him. If you have the courage to do so. Also the McCoy, must help."

"Help him? How? I've been trying."

She fixed him with a piercing stare that caused the hackles to rise on his neck. "Helped him? You have nearly buried him with your guilt. The visions I saw in his mind, I do not understand, but one is sure. He needs you so badly that without you he will surely die, yet he refuses to take what he needs because...he loves you." She shrugged bone-thin shoulders and her rags shifted about her like reeds in a dry wind. "If he breaks a leg, send for me."

All the blood was racing from Kirk, leaving him cold in its passing. He looked around at the witnesses to her words. He looked at McCoy, whose eyes had become sunken orbs of pain.

"I don't understand what she means," he whispered.

"Your only crime was that you loved too well," Quanaang quoted. "And I thought you meant your woman that you keep hidden on your ship."

"He is my friend," Kirk said simply, willing it to be true.

"Just as Meador was my friend," the big man said, pulling the Romulan to him, "a friend that gave up princehood for me. That only made the joining sweeter. I think you'd better go to your Vulcan before it is too late."

Kirk nodded and moved like a ghost towards the small room. McCoy started to follow him, but Quanaang put out his hand to stop him. "They don't need you, friend."

McCoy stared at him blankly. "Yes, they do. I'm part of this...them."

With a puzzled look Quanaang let him go. Pressing an affectionate kiss to the Romulan's neck he whispered. "This sounds interesting."

"Agreed."

☆☆☆☆☆

Kirk sensed rather than heard McCoy come into the room after him. He couldn't decide how he felt about that, except that he knew he could not exclude this friend anymore than he could deny Spock... what! What did the Vulcan need that he hadn't already offered?

He stood beside the bed for several long moments studying the man before him. Spock's eyes were tightly closed, his breathing ragged with the effort to maintain dignity. Kirk didn't understand the agony, but he could feel the residue of pain that seemed to reverberate between his two friends. The intensity of their ordeal scared the Hell out of him. Somehow he had to bridge that gap, come between them and absorb that pain. It had never been clearer that HE somehow had to give himself up to them, be consumed, before the Hell would end.

With his heart slamming in his chest, he reached down and took Spock's hand in his. It was cold. A Vulcan's hand--cold! Spock turned to him and opened his eyes.

"You should leave this place, Jim."

With a shrug of broad shoulders, Kirk answered. "It's too late for that, Spock. We're committed...fifteen years ago, seems like a thousand, we touched... something like this," and he cradled the cold hand in both of his. "We pledged friendship. I called you brother, remember?"

Spock gave a slow, painful nod. "I remember," he said in his deepest bass.

"Over the years, it's become more than that. I can't put my finger on when it changed, but we've gone past the realm of friendship. At least the way I interpret the word."

Kirk fell silent and all three men barely breathed as they listened to the silence. "What do you need, Spock? Tell me what to do."

Spock's grip on the Human's hand tightened. "I will destroy you."

In the darkness they could feel Kirk's smile. "You couldn't destroy a gnat. Monsters and queens and fleets of Klingons haven't made a considerable dent in me; what makes you think that you could?"

"I would tie you to me in a way that would be reprehensible to your nature. You are my greatest treasure, my sun and earth, and I would destroy you." With the effort of speech and the tension of the situation, Spock's breathing had become more labored, the pain more pronounced on his stark features.

McCoy stepped closer to them. "For God's sake, Jim! He needs your mind. What are you going to do; make him beg for it?"

Distracted, Jim turned to McCoy. "He had my mind for years. I never held anything back." He sat on the bunk beside Spock. "Take what you need."

The trust implicit in those words brought tears to the Vulcan's eyes. "It would be different, Jim. I never intruded on your private life before, but now I...am not strong enough to control the depth of the link. It would be...difficult for you."

Kirk lifted the Vulcan's hand to his face. "Do it, Spock! Whatever you need!"

"I fear you will hate me later when the full impact of your generosity is realized."

Fear! The fear was real enough. The intensity of need was a tangible thing in the room. The still air throbbed with necessity, longing that had become obsession. It was all the Human could do to sit beside the Vulcan and offer himself to be devoured. He couldn't answer and he couldn't move. He was open, vulnerable like a broken-winged bird before a cat of prey. Yet he wouldn't change it if he had the power to do so. A thousand years--no, an eternity--of commitment lay between them, and if it canceled out his existence, than so be it.

Spock hesitated that final second, using all his remaining strength to give Kirk one last chance to escape, but the game Human stayed, serving himself up as food for the gods. The Vulcan heaved himself up from the bunk with a loud groan and launched himself at the Human.

Kirk reacted with fighter's instinct to the attack, trying to fend off a wild animal, but the alien strength, even after his prolonged illness, was greater. The two went down on the floor, rolling about like wrestlers. Before Kirk understood what was happening, he was pinned beneath the Vulcan's superior weight. As one hand pressed on the exact spot for a nerve pinch, the other went for the Human's face.

The fear that Kirk had refused to acknowledge before, exploded in him when faced with this madman that he did not know. He heaved and twisted with all his strength, trying to dislodge the Vulcan. A small amount of pressure exerted at the juncture of shoulder and neck, brought on immediate dizziness, but not unconsciousness. Kirk was dimly aware of McCoy hammering at the Vulcan's back and head with double fisted blows that rolled off with the effectiveness of a child's.

"Spock, stop! For God's sake stop! This is Jim! Jim! Stop!"

The Vulcan merely shook his head at the annoyance. He pressed his fingers into Kirk's face so hard that the Human was afraid he would smash bones. "Let this be on your head, Jim. Your fault--not mine! You did it. Breached my barriers! Destroyed us both!"

Past the point of resistance and not

understanding the violence, Kirk managed to whisper. "What you need, Spock! Take what you need."

The Vulcan gave one final verbal cry that cut through the night like a wolf's howl, before he slipped into the labyrinth of the Human mind.

It was only then that Kirk understood the meaning of the word pain. This was no gentle probing followed by a pleasant tingling like he had known so many times before. This was a white-hot knife ripping its way into his mind. Instinctively he threw up mental shields that were tossed aside with the sensitivity of a battering ram wielded by a crazed, charging bull elephant. In all his experiences of being captured and held by all of the fearsome enemies that he had faced, he had never felt more defenseless. There was nothing to stop the rampaging alien mind that was consuming him, and he had never wished more desperately to have torture ended.

Just as suddenly as the assault had started, it stopped. Struggling for air, Kirk forced himself to attend to the situation. Something was happening. Turning away from the inner pain, he opened his eyes. The Vulcan's face was inches from his own. Spock's face reflected the horror in his own.

"Spock?" he croaked. "Why?"

"Need," the Vulcan whispered through cracked lips. "I need. Could not take the chance that I would be denied."

"Wha...what now?"

"The final desecration. Give it to me Jim! Will yourself to give me your essence.. your soul!"

With a monumental effort Kirk shook his head, and was immediately afraid it would come off. "How? How can I trust you now?"

The Vulcan laughed. It was an exceedingly bitter sound. "Because you are the Kirk. You can't deny me, Jim, though it is our destruction. Yield and I will make you immortal!"

Not knowing where the impulse originated, Kirk struggled up on his elbows and pressed his lips to the Vulcan's. Later, McCoy would testify that sparks of electricity leaped between them. At any rate, Spock bore the Human back to the floor, devouring him with his mouth. The two men writhed as in mortal combat, making animal sounds in their throat until finally they lay as still as death.

McCoy sobbed as he checked them for heartbeat, then he curled up as close to the two men as he could get, and fell into an exhausted doze.

Hours later as this planet's dawn struggled over the horizon, Kirk tried to move from under the tangled weight of the Vulcan's body. He was cold and stiff from lying on the stone floor, but it was his throbbing head that demanded attention.

McCoy uncurled stiffly when he felt Kirk moving. In the most professional manner he could maintain he asked. "You okay, Jim?"

"Can you help me move him? Kirk asked.

Together they lifted the still unconscious Vulcan and with great effort got him back on the bunk. McCoy covered him with a blanket, then turned concerned blue eyes to Jim. "You didn't answer me. How are you?"

Kirk grimaced and rubbed his forehead. "I'll survive." Directing his scrutiny to the Vulcan: "He is resting?" he looked at the doctor with a question in his eyes. "Such a deep sleep. Is that normal?"

McCoy shook his head. "As far as I can tell, it's the first true sleep he's had since he was resurrected. He'll probably be out for hours, but it's you I'm worried about. What he did: Can you handle it?"

Kirk shuddered, drawing a long, ragged breath into his lungs. "I didn't know for sure what he wanted. Now that I do, I'm scared shitless, but Bones," his chin shot up a fraction of an inch, "I will handle it, and you'll do everything in your power to help me."

"Whatever you say, Admiral."

"None of that 'admiral' crap. We've got enough problems. Let's see what Quanaang has planned for us today."

The two men started out of the room, when Kirk put his hand on the Doctor's thin shoulder. "I haven't forgotten you, Bones. You're part of this, and God knows I haven't forgotten it." He inclined his head back to the sleeping Vulcan. "Neither has he. Whether you like it or not, you're in."

Wide-eyed with amazement, McCoy followed Kirk out of the room.

They were not surprised to find that Quanaang and his Romulan were slumped in chairs just outside their door. Concern was plainly written on the big alien's craggy features.

"Did everything go well?" he questioned. "We were concerned for your well-being."

At the implications, and the realization that these two men had heard, even if they had not understood, his struggle with the Vulcan, all the color left Kirk's face. It was obvious what they thought, and Jim realized his disheveled appearance would only confirm their suspicions. He struggled to put on his best face. Denials would be counterproductive.

"Everything is fine."

"That is good. If you are able, we have things that must be discussed. There is still much unrest among my people concerning you."

Kirk straightened, pulling his courage around him like a cloak, to mask his own fatigue and dismay in front of this man, who could be his friend or enemy.

"Let's talk then, I'm not sure we had time last night for introductions. This is McCoy, my...healer."

Quanaang gave the Doctor a very close appraisal. "Why then did you need our healer?"

"McCoy is skilled in treating Humans and Vulcans, most of the time. But Spock needed help with something peculiar to his race. We hoped a Vulcan or Romulan would have more expertise."

The big alien reached over suddenly, grabbing Kirk by the wrist. Kirk moved by instinct, jerking his arm back, before he realized he was caught in a grip less yielding than metal. Standing stone still, he fixed Quanaang with a piercing stare. They held that pose for a full second, both men weighing muscle against muscle, bone against bone, possibility against possibility. As suddenly as he had grabbed him, Quanaang let Kirk go, his hearty laugh rumbling deep in his chest.

"Your race is as fragile as you look. I thought it some illusion. You are more delicate than a doll, yet you bring your challenge to my world with the strength of will of a warrior. Furthermore you dare to lie down with Vulcans. You are a paradox."

Kirk drew a deep breath, resisting the urge to rub his wrist. "Strength is not always a measure of muscle, and friendship seldom is. I am the Vulcan's friend, as I would like to be yours. You offered me guesting privileges, if you wish to withdraw them, I will go back to my ship. I venture that you need what we have to offer, more than I need you."

Again Quanaang roared with laughter. "If you left my house, do you imagine that you could overcome the entire colony, or live here without my blessing? There are clever and powerful men out there that would have no qualms as to what to do with you or your people." Quanaang stopped for emphasis, raking the Human with his eyes, but Kirk refused to react by so much as a muscle twitch.

"I offered you sanctuary. I do not renege on my pledges, no matter the provocation, and still you have no alternative. You have run to the end of the galaxy, and from this place there is no return."

With a conscious effort to still the jackhammer slamming of his heart, and not betray the trembling of his legs, "You've said that before, but I'm not convinced it is true." He tapped his skull. "In fact, I'm sure now that it is not true. We can leave here if we choose, and we can take you with us."

He did not remember any transfer of information with Spock, while they had been locked in their mental battle, but apparently there had been some.

"How?"

"My Vulcan friend told me last night that certain of our assumptions were not true, and yours based on outdated information. True, with your antique equipment, you could not make the trip back, but with our aid and what Sarek has sent us, we could modify your craft and lead you back to the other side."

Quanaang shook his head.

"I can't go back."

Cond-

Quanaang shook his massive head. "We can't go back. We are all fugitives. Condemned to die."

"For the most part, your enemies and whatever crimes you were charged with no longer exist. Your world is gone, but the Federation could find new homes--new starts in life for all of you."

"What about yourself?" asked Quanaang.
"Your crimes are not so old. Can you afford
to return?"

"I didn't run away to hide forever. I just left an untenable situation until I could find a way to solve it. Things have happened that I didn't expect." His hand traveled to his forehead and he pressed against some unseen pain. "But I'm not finished yet."

"I knew you were a brave man, but I'm not sure how many of our people are willing to leave. They've built lives here. Maybe not much by your standards, but to us they are satisfying."

Kirk studied the man. "You do not remind me of the sort to be satisfied ruling in a sandpile, when there is a universe to be explored."

Quanaang sat back. "You presume a great deal."

"The decision is yours. In the meantime we've got a lot to do. We need to examine all of the things that Sarek sent, set up a base of operations, inventory your equipment...." Kirk stopped. "The list is endless."

Quanaang nodded. "In that case, I have even more to do. There are some we can convince. Some who will never leave, but will throw every obstacle in our way to prevent us from leaving." Observing the deep shadows under Kirk's eyes, "I wager there are still things not settled in your own camp."

Kirk pressed his eyes. "No, not everything." Turning to leave, "You've got to tell me when it is safe for me to land my craft and bring the rest of my people down."

"When you trust me, Kirk."

Kirk nodded tiredly, but there was a gleam in his eye as he smiled and flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Scotty!"

"Aye, sir."

"You can bring her down Quanaang, will direct site."

It was hours later and many layers of fatigue before the dull throb in Kirk's brain changed to sharp jabs. Kirk looked over to where McCoy was watchfully waiting for him to conclude his business. A raised eyebrow confirmed what Kirk suspected. He turned to Meador, who had become a second shadow for him, "I'm going to have to rest. Can you finish billeting my people?"

The lanky Romulan inclined his head.
"I would be honored. Go to your man.
Your crew is in good hands."

Not caring much for the implications, but realizing that they were true in a sense not yet realized, and that the Romulan meant no offense, Kirk excused himself. One thing that he realized from the Romulan's attitude was that Spock shared something with this far-distant cousin, perhaps more than he did with his Vulcan heritage.

By the time he and McCoy had reached the door to their joint quarters, the pain in Kirk's skull was blinding in intensity. Nevertheless, he hesitated outside the door, blocking McCoy's way. "I'm going in alone."

"You said that I was part of this."
McCoy's voice was sharp, cutting through like a knife.

"You are, Bones," Kirk soothed, "but there is still so much that only Spock and I can work out."

"He's half-crazed, Jim. Think about last night! He can't control himself. He's admitted that." McCoy put his arm on Kirk's shoulder and moved closer to him in a protective gesture. "He could hurt you without realizing what he's doing."

Kirk put both hands on McCoy's shoulders and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Could you prevent that by being there anymore than you could stop him last night?"

"But Jim!" McCoy cried as Kirk turned from him, entered the room and shut the door firmly behind him. The Doctor stood outside the closed door with anger rising in him, but years of obeying this man won out. He sighed and flopped into the chair that Meador had used the night before for his vigil.

It took some time for Kirk's eyes to adjust to the closed, dim, cavelike room. The air was stifling and there was a familiar, musky odor that caused the hair to rise on the back of his neck.

"Spock?" he called as he felt a movement in the furthest corner.

"I asked you last night to leave me, Admiral. You refused and suffered the consequences." The deep voice faltered. "Now I...beg you, on behalf of whatever friendship we've ever shared, to leave this place."

Kirk had to work his throat to get words out. "We've come too far to go back," Spock said. "I know that."

"So you understand to what I mean if you refuse to leave?"

"You could see him, and release him."

"You could release him in some room thin as a flea."

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Kirk had to work his throat to get any sounds out. "We've come too far to go back now, Spock. You know that. I know that. It's not a matter of choice--for either of us."

"Do you understand to what you commit us both if you refuse to leave?"

Kirk shook his head in the darkness, knowing that Spock could see him, and hoping that the movement would release him from his terror. He had to regain some semblance of himself, for upon entering the room and sensing the brooding alien within, all his selfness and natural courage had fled. He was afraid. Perhaps as scared as he had ever been, but he couldn't turn back.

Whether the Vulcan realized it or not, he had spun a fine web, and Kirk was caught in it. He watched with wary, fear-bright eyes as Spock advanced slowly on him. He felt like a small bird, captivated by the hypnotic stare of a hunting cat, knowing he was going to be eaten and completely unable to move to prevent it. Unable and unwilling. This had been coming for fifteen years. He had courted it and by the eyes of all his enemies, he wouldn't run now.

But intellect and instinct sometimes find it hard to agree. When the hot hand shot out of the darkness and grabbed him by the wrist, he jumped. Schooling himself to acceptance, he forced his trembling body to stand still as the second hand tangled itself in the hair at the back of his head and jerked.

"You realize that I am in pon farr?" The deep voice cracked, the sound grating on Kirk's inflamed nerves as the Human endeavored to nod his head in affirmation.

"As soon as I entered the room."

"It is the natural progression of the aging process. I reached maturity on the Genesis planet, and fathered a child on the woman that attended me."

"Saavik!"

"She-that-served," Spock grated. His cracked lips drawn back over his teeth. "Now it is your turn. You who have taunted me with your infidelities! You who have baited me with your willfulness! You who have wooed me with your friendship!"

"It doesn't have to be this way, Spock." Kirk tried to reason, but the Vulcan was in no mood for conversation. With killing force, he crushed the Human to him.

Wanting to be able to give himself to his friend, but with gutter instinct refusal to submit himself to violence, Kirk jammed his free hand in Spock's face, clawing for the eyes. At the same time, he sacrificed his precarious balance by the lift of a well-placed knee. Under normal circumstances, Spock would have been prepared for such a move, but there

was nothing normal about this situation. The Vulcan staggered back, falling but not relinquishing his hold with either hand. Kirk went with him. They landed hard, grunting as a whoosh of air was forced out of them. Without hesitation, the two Fleet-trained fighters rolled on the floor, wrestling for any advantage.

As a scrapper, Kirk had nothing of which to be ashamed regardless of his opponent, but Spock had the manic strength of a pon farr male to augment his usual advantages. With a crazed roar, he rolled Kirk over. With a savage jerk that threatened to snap Kirk's neck, he subdued the Human.

"You struggle in vain, Admiral."

Chest heaving with the effort to get air into his lungs, Kirk suddenly went limp in the Vulcan's grasp. Startled, Spock waited for a second for some typical Kirkian trick, then he let go of his quarry and began checking the Human with shaking hands.

"Jim! Jim, are you all right!"

With a deep sigh, Kirk opened hazel eyes and stared up into Spock's. "Why are we fighting?"

The madness momentarily dispelled by his fear, Spock shook his head. Kirk could feel the movement in the darkness.

"I must possess you, Jim. It is necessary for my continued existence."

The voice was filled with sadness and another quality, though Kirk could not see his face.

"If you do this Spock, you will destroy both of us. I...I'd let you have me, but not like this. You'll never be able to live with the shame, and I'll never be able to look you in the face again!"

There was no sound except the two men's labored breathing.

"Do you hear me, Spock? I'd let you have me. Just not like this!"

"It...is...too late. I must have... now!"

With the swiftness of a cobra's strike, Spock positioned his hand on Kirk's face. Jim cried out as the lance of Spock's fevered mind sliced through him.

He had given reason his best shot, now he fought with a ferocity to match any trapped animal's but he wasn't--had never been--a match for even a sick Vulcan. With stunning rapidity, he found himself on his knees, face down on the rumpled cot that Spock had lain in only hours before, only breaths away from death.

"Remember," he told himself. "Remember why all this has come to pass." He had brought Spock here, brought him back from the dead, captured him from the bosom

of his people. For what? "For what, if not for this."

"Relax," he willed and collapsed on the bed. "Get through this and on with it. You've always known. One way or another, you've always known."

"Fascinating," Spock was saying as he ripped synthetic material with his bare hands to expose pale, trembling buttocks.

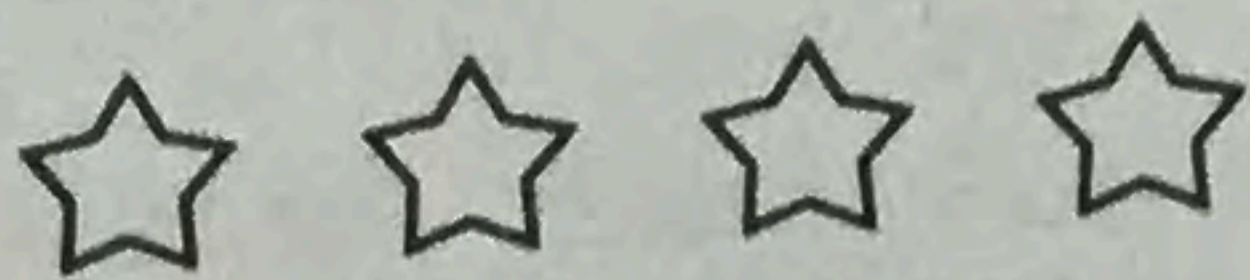
He was gone again. Kirk knew that. Slipped back into the madness that was his heritage once every cycle of his adult life. He had killed Kirk once in just such a lust. No matter that it was a trick. He had killed him, and Kirk grimaced as an ungentle hand probed at him. He could kill him again, now, and it would be no trick. No McCoy to intervene. Then he thought of McCoy on the other side of that door. What would Spock do to him? He wasn't exempt this time. He was part of it, too.

Thinking that it was important to get through this quietly, so as not to bring McCoy in to witness the horror, and perhaps force some other tragedy, Kirk nonetheless cried out as he was split by relentless, white-hot pain.

"Spooockkk!!!"

The rest was lost in inarticulate cries deep in his throat as his body was slammed into the cot with the terrible force of the rutting.

Dimly, he realized that McCoy had come in, and that he was pleading and shouting and trying to pull the Vulcan off of him. Vaguely, he realized that someone else had entered the room. He heard the whine of the phaser and welcomed it. Welcomed the surcease of the agony even if it meant death.



When he struggled back to the edge of consciousness some hours later, he swallowed the nausea that threatened him, to frame the all-important question of McCoy who was hovering over him.

"How's Spock?"

"In better shape than you are."

The pain was beginning to register and the realization of what McCoy would have found, but this was no time for his hang-ups. "He's in pon farr, McCoy. Damn! We should have known!"

"And done what?"

With hazel eyes clear he faced his friend. "I've considered what I'd do for a long time--if he ever came to me. Now don't tell me that you haven't! We've both faced this possibility for far too long not to have considered what we would do to save his life!"

McCoy simply nodded, acknowledging the truth of that statement. The fact had hung over their lives since Spock's first, and as far as they knew only, pon farr.

"I planned to go to him in the very beginning, as soon as we recognized any of the symptoms," Kirk continued. "I figured if I could just get to him before he went crazy, I could show him that it didn't have to be so terrible."

He slammed his fist on the bed. "But as usual, when it happened I was too damn busy to even notice!"

"C'mon, Jim! You've had your hands full ever since we hit this Hellhole, and besides I was with him all the time and I never suspected a thing. I have a feeling it had a lot to do with the Genesis planet and the time he spent in that temple."

Kirk looked up with interest. "You might be right about the temple. That would have been quite a coup for them if they managed to stimulate him into pon farr when he was too vulnerable to fight it. I'm sure that is what he has done all these years. Then they could provide an unbonded male with an assortment of lithe, young, dutiful priestesses and--poof--instant heir."

"I don't know if I'd go that far, Jim."

"Well, I would."

As he had talked, the tension had risen in his body. Now he collapsed onto the bed in fatigue. "How bad am I, Bones?"

"Bad enough. I was able to repair the damage with my laser scalpel, but you still need a couple of days off your feet." He put out his hand as Kirk was getting out of bed.

"Which I don't have time for." He stood and grimaced as he straightened.

"Jim! You can't be serious. For God's sake get back in that bed!"

Kirk put his hands on the Doctor's shoulders for comfort as well as support as he swayed. "The show must go on, Bones," he said in his most convincing tone. "We can't have Quanaang running away with our little project. We still have the uneasy natives to convince to help us get out of here. Spock is still in pon farr." He shot the doctor a questioning look as he pulled into a pair of pants.

"Spock started to come round about a half hour ago." The Doctor shrugged. "I gave him a shot."

"Which will hold him how long?"

"Long enough for you to exhaust yourself with other matters, but that doesn't solve your problem."

Kirk nodded as he gently pulled into a shirt. Any movement involved the complaints

of a dozen injuries. "I want to be there as soon as he starts coming round."

"Jim, if he puts you down again, he's likely to rip you like a dressed hog."

Kirk fixed the Doctor with his most straightforward stare. "I want to be there as soon as he stirs."

"Jim...." McCoy called to a retreating back.



It was harder than he thought to face Quanaang. He wasn't sure who it was that had come into the room and found him. It wouldn't have been pretty, but he didn't have time to play games. He did make an extra effort not to walk like he still had something rammed up his ass.

He met first Quanaang's then Meador's eyes as he asked, "What progress have you made with your people?"

"You have not been incapacitated that long lit...." Admiral. These things take time. Meador, on the other hand, informs me that you are having problems with your Vulcan."

Kirk took a deep breath. For some reason that he could not define, he was glad that it had been Meador. "Spock is still quite ill, but we can handle it."

There was the tiniest smirk on the big man's face. "You, I imagine, would have some trouble with the situation. You're not the kind of man who would take kindly to being on the bottom."

"That's none of your business!"

He hurt all over, and he was ashamed, and he sure as Hell wasn't going to stand here and take this bastard's taunts.

"Oh, but it is. You are my guest, and I would not have a guest inconvenienced while under my roof and my protection. Besides, what's all the fuss. If your man is in heat, then I have at least a dozen maids who would attend him. I've already told you that our community is starved for new seed. I can understand now why you refused my daughter, but surely you would not object to sharing your bounty."

Kirk felt himself swaying. He couldn't pass out. Not now. He centered on a small island of security somewhere in his middle and pulled himself up until he heard his backbone crack.

"This is between the Vulcan and me. You can't help and I don't appreciate any interference. I've offered you all the technology I have and a chance at a new life. Even if you can no longer respect me as a man, at least recognize my accomplishments as a spacer. I can get all of you out of here."

Meador rose to his feet and came over,

offering Kirk a steadying hand. "There is no mark on your honor. Some are called to serve," he turned to Quanaang, "as I do, but no one dares to lay dirt on my honor. If the passage for you and the Vulcan into manhood has been difficult, I lay it to the fact that you are alien to one another, and not to anything lacking in either of you."

Drawing strength from the understanding presence of the Romulan, Kirk stood straighter. "There has been trouble," he managed, "but you may have given me a key to understanding." He turned to Quanaang. "I offer you something greater than studs for your women. Convince your people that this is a good thing. Sarek has sent you the capability to escape your exile." He cocked his head to one side studying the giant. "But then perhaps you are the one who is afraid: afraid that you cannot make it in the real, free world. You have skulked and hidden for so long, railing against those who oppressed you. Now you have a chance to go back and right those wrongs, but you cower like children, happy in your own inbred dirt."

Quanaang had risen to his feet, towering over the Human and his Romulan consort. Anger had risen to his face like a red sheet. "You dare to accuse me of cowardice when you cannot even lie with your own man!"

"You're damned right I've been afraid, but at least I've faced my terror--tried to face it. Have you?"

Meador left Kirk and stood beside Quanaang. "He is your guest," he reminded gently, "and he could be right."

Quanaang jerked his attention from Kirk to his man. He shook his head and dragged a long breath into his lungs, collapsing back into his chair. "You are right. On both counts. Go, Kirk! Deal with your problems and I will deal with mine."

Kirk left quickly, hurrying down the long hallways to Spock's room. Ashamed! Ashamed, ashamed! He had been ashamed! Ashamed to be--Quanaang was right--ashamed to be on the bottom. It would have been all right if Spock had let him screw him. Not Kirk! Just not stud Kirk getting it in the ass!

He was practically running by the time he got to the room. Ashamed! That was it all along. He had dreamed of it. Planned for it! At times even wanted it! Hell! Lots of times! Jesus! When he thought of the nights he had lain there panting, wanting it, beating himself off and nearly dying when he came because he wanted it so bad.

Wanted it, but he had been ashamed! That was the bottom line. He had said to Spock, "Take what you need," and meant it, but everytime he had fought. Shame. He couldn't do it. Couldn't let go. Had to be in charge. He wanted more than anything in the world to save Spock. Had

proved that. Had given up everything that he thought had mattered for this man, but he couldn't do it when it counted. Couldn't go down for him! But he would. By damn, if it killed him, he would!

He stood at the closed door, feeling the tension radiating from the room. He swallowed down panic as he felt old terrors rising in him. Insecure. He was so damned insecure. That's why it was so hard to give in. It took a strong person to go down for someone else. Strong! Not weak! With a small streak of understanding dawning, he entered the room.

Spock had McCoy by both wrists and was dragging him down on the cot with him.

"No!"

Both men turned to him. Spock let McCoy go with a moan and flopped back down on the bed. McCoy stepped back rubbing his wrists. Kirk crossed over and stood beside his friend.

"I would not have harmed him," Spock said in a defeated voice. "He was trying to give me another shot."

Kirk turned on McCoy. "I told you to call me as soon as he started coming round."

"It was too soon, Jim."

"I'll be the judge of that."

"Be careful, Jim." McCoy said.

"The Doctor is right. I have already proved that I cannot be trusted." He turned burning eyes to Kirk. "I would rather die than do again what I did. Please, can you forgive me?"

Kirk approached his friend cautiously, searching the eyes for signs of sanity. He sat down on the side of the same bunk on which he had been raped. Spock shuddered. "Spock, we are going to get through this thing. We have beaten every kind of Hell the universe has thrown at us, and we can beat this."

Spock almost smiled. "You have tried, my friend. I heard your offer, but because of my...savageness it is all finished. Do not fault yourself. My Vulcan nature has had its final say. I concede. I will my existence to end, rather than harm my friends further."

Taking Spock's hand in his, he traced the graceful, long fingers with his own. Then he locked them together. "Yes, I've said that I was trying, but actually I was holding back. There was something...vital that I was afraid to give up. I was ashamed, Spock. I accused you of being ashamed of me, while all the time I was afraid that you would make me your...woman...somehow I'd be inferior. I could take anything but that."

"It was not your fault. I was crude."

Kirk gave the hand he was holding a reassuring squeeze, let it go and moved away from Spock, giving them both some breathing room. Spock flinched as if he had been struck.

"Spock, I know you're sensitive at this time, and I know the horrors of pon farr for you," he looked deeply into feverish eyes to make sure that the Vulcan was listening to him. "But if we're going to get through this with both personalities intact, you're...we're going to have to make some adjustments."

Spock sat a little straighter on the bed. "I have already said that I could control sufficiently...."

"How much control, Spock?"

"Not to rape you again." The voice was tight, but Kirk nodded in satisfaction.

"That's good, because I'm not into rape."

Spock closed his eyes and gripped the sides of the bunk with trembling hands.

"The release of our encounter should be sufficient to save my life."

Kirk shifted slightly closer. "You do know there are alternate ways to release sexual tension?"

Spock opened his eyes. "I do not think such methods would be effective in pon farr."

"I'd be willing to give it a shot, if you are. We really don't have that much to lose. But one thing for sure, I won't let you rape me again. We're right in the middle of a mess, trying to get out of here, and I can't afford to end up half dead; but most importantly, if we're going to have a relationship, it's got to be based on more than uncontrolled lust. I want to help you, but I can't if I won't be able to live with the results when it's over."

"That seems logical."

"Logical, huh," Kirk said as he inched closer, firmly pulling the covers from clenched fingers. "Just a warning, if this gets out of hand, McCoy has my permission to administer one of those nasty shots of his."

"Understood."

"In that case, let go of the covers."

Drawing a deep breath and shutting his eyes tightly, the Vulcan allowed the Human to remove the covers, exposing his lean, naked body. It bothered him that McCoy would witness this, but then, what hadn't he witnessed in their years of serving together? Very quickly, he couldn't think of McCoy at all. He could only think of the sensation of Kirk's fine hands roaming so easily over his bare chest. He shuddered and made a small noise in his throat.

"Sex doesn't have to hurt, Spock. In fact it never should."

The voice seem disembodied. The roaming hands stopped at his nipples, pulling at them, rolling them. Spock groaned as a flash of white-hot sensation coursed through his insides. He rolled his head back and forth on the pillow, his breath coming in short gasps.

The hands abandoned his nipples to be replaced by a wet tongue, teasing him until he let go of the sides of the bunk and grabbed Kirk.

"NO!" The tone, if not the threat, was enough to stop him. He wanted to grab the Human, crush and subdue him, then take, take, take what he wanted, had wanted, needed, for so long. Firm hands were placing his arms back at his sides.

"Be patient with me, Spock. I'll make this good for you."

The words were not that reassuring, but the hands that trailed lower down his stomach were distracting.

"I won't tease you anymore. Most people like a little foreplay, but I guess in your condition I'd better get right down to business."

First there were the hands, stroking, exploring; without warning there was the mouth. Spock cried out at the first feather touch, but the words were incoherent. The Vulcan abandoned himself to the touch, drinking in all the sensations, hoping it would never end; yet insane to grab, to hold, to thrust, to be inside. He growled his frustration, but did not dare move his hands from the side of the bunk. Wood splintered. He spurted. He came like a geyser into Kirk's mouth.

When his breathing had reached almost normal and he was coherent, he noticed that Kirk had not let go of him. Had not turned away from him. Had not vomited, or left, or done anything to show his disgust. Instead, he still bent over his groin. Doing, what was he doing? The Human still held him in his mouth, sucking the last dregs of his issue.

Kirk lifted his head and looked into Spock's eyes. "Did that help any?"

It was all so overwhelming, Spock didn't know how to respond. Help! It had been incredible! Still, Spock didn't know for sure why Kirk had done it. To save his life. Just one more way. After all, this same man had done almost everything else for him. His career, his son, his ship. Was this just another method? And McCoy? McCoy was standing there with the shot ready and a look of...what? Stunned disbelief on his face.

Apparently no response was required. Kirk stood, and with a nod of his head for McCoy to follow, stepped out of the room.

"Can you give me a stimulant? I need to get back to Quanaang."

"What about him?"

Shaking his head, Kirk said, "Right now I don't have time for it. Can you handle him?"

"I...I can give him another shot."

"Bones, I think he needs more than that--from you."

"Jim...I can't!"

"I know you've been shanghaied into this, but you...could help. You've held his mind closer than I have."

"I love him as much as I love myself, but I don't think...."

"Are you trying to tell me that you wouldn't know how to help yourself if you woke up with the hots?"

McCoy ducked his head. "Yes, I guess I do."

"I'll be back as soon as I can."

McCoy looked as miserable as Kirk had ever seen him, but he knew that he could rely on his friend. Spock had known that too, and at the moment of death, he had trusted McCoy with the thing most precious to him. Kirk could do no less.

His meeting with Quanaang was uneventful, yet promising. It was like watching a young person turn on to some fascinating possibility. As plans for a return trip through the anomaly unfolded, Quanaang became more and more intrigued. He and Meador and Scotty were deep into an engineering discussion. They barely acknowledged that Kirk was there. This relieved Kirk's mind of one problem. He could safely leave the fugitives in his crew's capable hands for a time.

Turning back to his borrowed room, he smiled even as a twinge of pain shot straight up his ass. He was going to work this thing through with Spock and McCoy, and he was going to do it now. They had all three danced and side-stepped and half-truthed each other for years, and it was going to come to an end now. He was going to settle this hash even if it literally meant his ass.

When he eased into the darkened room, he was greeted with a strange scene. Spock was lying naked on a pallet of blankets on the floor with McCoy bending over him as he had so many hundreds of times before. He could have been giving a medical scan, except that he was lending his professional skill to a very handy piece of masturbation.

The Vulcan's head was thrown back and he was showing all signs of complete cooperation. They turned their heads as Kirk approached.

"Don't let me interfere. You two are doing a fine job."

"Don't get smart. I'm just standing in 'til you got back." McCoy started to rise, but was caught by the arm by Spock, and simultaneously by the shoulders by Kirk.

"You're not going anywhere," Kirk said. "You are a part of this whether you like it or not," he smiled his boyish grin. "So you might as well enjoy it."

"Jim."

"You won't have to do anything that you don't want to. I promise. Just stay with us."

Spock lifted his head. "The Admiral is incorrect. For us to be complete, you must join with us," he hesitated, "at least once."

McCoy shrugged but he was as tense as a coiled spring. "Whatever you fellas need. I...I'll try."

Kirk settled down beside him. "Not for us, Bones. That was where I went wrong. Do it for yourself. Be that honest. Say you want it as much as we do."

McCoy met Jim's eyes with a stunned expression, but he did not deny it so Kirk said it for him. "Damn right! Me too! I've been wanting to get laid all this time, but I didn't have the balls to admit it. Not even to myself--especially not to myself. Spock has been going around with his tongue hanging out all this time, but he didn't think he was worthy of me." He gave a disbelieving snort. "Think of it! Didn't think he was worthy of me?"

"Now, you don't really believe that you are going to get away with any bull about, 'whatever we need!'"

The hazel eyes were full, as expressive and bright as McCoy had ever seen them. The man was still the picture of everything McCoy had ever wanted to be. McCoy swallowed and nodded.

"You're right! I want it. Both of you! Never dreamed I'd get the chance to do even what I just did to Spock. Hell, I'm scared." He turned to Spock who was sitting up on one elbow.

"I've always enjoyed my women, and a couple of times I've let myself go kinky, but I've never even, well, maybe dreamed of anything like this!"

"I believe, Doctor, this occasion will have little resemblance to any other you have ever participated in."

Kirk was running his hands over McCoy's bone-thin shoulders. With great care, he inched them to the fastenings of his jacket and began removing it. "It will be all right, Bones. Trust me."

McCoy clenched his eyes closed. It still didn't seem quite right, but the familiar hands moved on relentlessly until he was shrugging out of the confining cloth. Spock joined in to help with his trousers. McCoy wanted to huddle when he was finally naked before them. He wasn't young anymore. Hell, none of them were! But Kirk still kept his body like a fighter's, and though Spock's face was ravaged by the extremities of his suffering, his body was lithe and strong like a trained dancer.

The two men were bathing him with attention, one on each side, as they explored every inch of his upper body. Spock was as gentle with him as he was with a small animal. There was no trace of any of the savagery he had heaped upon Kirk, and there seemed to be no reticence on the Vulcan's part to participate in this bizarre experience.

As McCoy's heart rate started to accelerate, Spock changed his position so that he could be in a position to initiate a meld. Kirk watched as the long fingers sought familiar pathways, then he turned his attention to McCoy's waistline, malinger at the navel.

Spock hesitated. "This will be forever, McCoy."

"Jesus! You Vulcan's have the worst sense of timing."

Spock smiled and pressed. "You could be right," he said as he slipped into the Human's familiar mind. At the same time, Kirk slipped his head down to sniff at McCoy's cock.

McCoy made a sound in his throat.

Anchored in Kirk's mind and familiar with McCoy's, Spock allowed himself to be guided by the sensations radiating from his partners. At first McCoy had to be led like a child, but as the warmth and surety flowed from Kirk, and the awe and sensuality rose from Spock, the Doctor melted with them.

The three men merged together in an ever-increasing struggle for unity. There were groans and sighs as their most secret desires were touched and opened. There were laughter and tears as the realization of a thousand dreams came true with a feather brush of lips or a powerful, frantic thrust. The incredible possibility of taking and being taken, of touching and being touched, of possessing and being possessed. Someone was exploring every fissure, inserting, opening, filling! The crescendo was climbing up the scale! Up! Up! Higher! Higher! Reaching! Impossible! Can't! Must! Strangled screams that degenerated into ecstatic whimpers. Exhausted bodies, curling together in total satiation.

When Kirk woke, he was cradled in Spock's arms. McCoy was curled up beside him, his head resting on Kirk's lap. Both were awake and waiting for him.

"Not bad, eh?"

McCoy lifted his head from one to ten, I'd rate him as an unprecedented rating in my history. "Not necessary, Doctor. You, my Vulcan...friend, as to how his new relationship was puzzled as to how he did not have a great deal for comparison." "Agreed, but I wager that you'll do." "His mood suddenly changed, what do you think?" "He shrugged thin shoulders, said something about needing to do things for you. I mean, the two of you, just because only one Spock could get to be died."

Stroking back the gray hair, Kirk said, "You've always been we were. You and Spock, snoring, exposing your hearts, other's throats one minute, horrible punishments for each next." He looked over his shoulder, but continued on his love you Bones, and that was for Spock, but it doesn't

"I am capable of declaring, and yes, Leonard, I love you, but my esteem for you will allow yourself when I believe that our relationship will benefit immeasurably."

The two Humans looked and shook their heads. "Yes."

Kirk reached over and two very different, but pieces of his partners' still a few details that

When the three men from the small room were greeted by a bleary-eyed crew and concerned glances to a were indeed fit, they reports and plans and the return trip.

Still a little of his hand for silence. "When can we get your approval? We don't have the first with what we have

McCoy lifted his head. "On a scale from one to ten, I'd rate it...."

"Not necessary, Doctor. The incident has an unprecedented rating in my book."

"You, my Vulcan...friend," McCoy's expression was puzzled as to how to express his new relationship, but he went on with his remark, "did not have a great deal of data for comparison."

"Agreed, but I wager that you found me a fast study."

McCoy lifted an elegant brow. "You'll do." His mood suddenly serious. "Uh, fellas, does this mean I'm in or what?"

Kirk matched his tone. "Bones, after that, what do you think?"

He shrugged thin shoulders, "Spock said something about needing me to complete things for you. I mean, if it's over, I can bow out. I won't horn in on the two of you, just because I was the only one Spock could get to just before he died."

Stroking back the graying hair, Kirk said, "You've always been part of what we were. You and Spock, sniping at each other, exposing your hearts. Cutting each other's throats one minute, and taking horrible punishments for each other the next." He looked over his shoulder at Spock, but continued on his own. "I love you Bones, and that would be enough for Spock, but it doesn't have to be."

"I am capable of declaring myself, Jim, and yes, Leonard, I will not say 'love', but my esteem for you is unlimited. If you will allow yourself to be involved, then I believe that our mutual relationship will benefit immeasurably."

The two Humans looked at each other and shook their heads. "That must mean 'yes'."

Kirk reached over and started teasing two very different, but very interesting, pieces of his partners' anatomy. "There's still a few details that need to be worked out."

When the three men finally emerged from the small room several hours later, they were greeted by equally exhausted and bleary-eyed crew and hosts. After concerned glances to assure that they were indeed fit, they were assaulted with reports and plans and calculations for the return trip.

Still a little disoriented, Kirk held up his hand for silence. He turned first to Scotty. "When can you have these craft ready?"

"We're ready to start working as soon as we get your approval on the designs, sir. We don't have the facilities we could use, but with what we have available, I can put

together three ships capable of weathering the turbulence. Our BIRD, Quanaang's warship, and the devil's own hodgepodge of half a dozen vessels to make up a floating barn."

Looking at the blueprints, Kirk was doubtful. "This is awfully big. Are you sure it can take the stress?"

"I would not trust my people to it, if I were not convinced," Quanaang answered.

"No, of course not." Directing his questions to his engineer, "Is it maneuverable enough?"

"Aye, sir, and I'll be riding her myself, just in case there's any wee problems."

"How are you coming with your people, Quanaang?"

"As in any large group, there are some holdouts." At Kirk's questioning look, "Every man has his own reasons. Some do not trust that the law they fled from is not still in power. Some do not believe that we will make it back." He shrugged heavy, broad shoulders. "There is much still that I must accept on faith. Then there are many who simply are satisfied with the life they have scratched out of the dirt and rocks here. Their sandpile is big enough for them."

Kirk met those big, intelligent eyes and acknowledged the man's fear and trust and courage. "Will they try to oppose our leaving?"

A broad grin told the story. "They do not want to go with us. That does not mean that they are idiots."

"Okay," looking to his own faithful few. "We really haven't solved any of our legal problems since we've been gone. Any dissenting votes to returning?"

"Jim," the given name slipped past the Vulcan's lips so easily that it caught some of the crew by surprise. "My father will have had time to negotiate on everyone's behalf. Since he provided us with all the equipment necessary for this venture, I doubt seriously if we will catch him unprepared for our return."

"Right." Directing his gaze levelly at all those present, Kirk walked over and drew Spock forward by the hand. He then reached and drew McCoy to stand with them. "I'll make this announcement now to clear everything up. Mr. Spock, Doctor McCoy and I have entered into a unique relationship." Hazel eyes flashed. "One, I'm sure, that not everyone, even our closest friends, will be able to... understand."

All the eyes that met his were clear and unembarrassed. "Ye've got nothing to apologize for, Admiral," said Scotty. "We all know how you feel about each other."

Uhura stepped forward. "We're happy for you, sirs. It's wonderful that you

have been able to go beyond the limits placed on us by society, and realize the beauty of what you have."

With surprisingly full eyes, Kirk murmured, "Thank you, Commander. All of you." Squeezing Spock's arm then McCoy's hand, "We appreciate all of you."

Quanaang came forward slapping each one, including Spock, on the back, hugging Kirk to his broad chest. "Damn, right! I like your style, Human! Just sorry Meador and I didn't get to you first." Cocking his head to the side for a thoughtful moment, "Maybe on the other side, we will find warriors equal to our passion. Eh, Meador?"

The dark eyes didn't seem worried, but the lean Romulan answered cryptically. "You have been working too hard. Perhaps we should retire for a few hours so that I can remind you why you do not need anyone else."

The big man raked his man with a thoughtful stare. "Ah, yes. Memory does serve." Turning to the others, "But it has been a very busy time with much to do. I suggest we all take a few hours to refresh our souls. In a very short time, we will risk everything to this venture, and it is necessary that we prepare our minds and souls as well as our equipment."

The suggestion was a good one. Everyone needed rest or--whatever. As the natives left, the crew came singly to shake the hands of their senior officers and friends.

When the room was empty of all save the three men, they gave a collective sigh. McCoy put his hand up to his temple and pressed, "It still takes some getting used to, even for me, and I'm part of it."

Kirk looked over and noticed the slight trembling of the Vulcan's hand. He knew that Spock was still in flux with left-over tremors of the pon farr, not to mention the residue of horror remaining from his death and resurrection. No, there were still a dozen details to work out--he smiled--but they would have each other: the bulldog tenacity of McCoy, not to mention his own brand of stubbornness.

He squeezed both men's hands again. The physical touch was more reassuring to him than the mental touch that Spock lavished on them. There was still Saavik and possibly a child. And Spock's father: if he had been shocked at the possibility of Kirk, what would he do when confronted with McCoy, too. Then, there was all of Vulcan, who would hardly smile and shake their hands. There was Starfleet, good old fashioned Starfleet, with their conventional ways and their courtmartial. And the Klingons, looking for a lost ship and a pinch of revenge.

The Human gave a mighty sigh. It wasn't over yet.

It was the doctor who put their collective fears into words. "Gentlemen, there is one thing that I have learned in all my collective years of performing miracles with my medicine, roaming the stars and dealing with dozens of unorthodox lifeforms. Remember the Horta? V'ger?"

When the men focused their attention outwards on him, rather than inwards on the mountain of their problems, McCoy went on. "Remember all the dozens of others, the impossible situations we escaped from all because we, one of us or another, refused to accept defeat? Jim, you, when you set the destruct sequence? Spock, you, when you went in that reactor room?"

"It's what our friends were trying to tell us, and what we've known all along. Limits exist only in the mind. We've seen our limits, tested them and pushed them back." His voice soared with excitement. "By damn! Let them bring on their disapproval and insults! We've reached beyond their pettiness. Let them bring on their fucking courtmartial! Screw them! We'll take their asshole, bureaucratic nonsense and no telling what we'll do with it. Hell, he said a little subdued after venting his apprehension, "I'm going to be a father." He looked at a puzzled Spock. "That is what this is all about, isn't it? I mean Saavik is going to have your child, which will actually be mine and Jim's, too."

Kirk interrupted at that. "Now, come on, Bones! We can't presume on that relationship."

Spock hung his head. "It is imperative to remember that Lieutenant Saavik performed as any Vulcan woman would have under the circumstances. She suffered my... atrocities to save my life."

"Oh, c'mon, Spock," Kirk groaned. "The woman is totally crazy about you. I know she did what she had to do because she had no choice, but don't try to hand me that crap." Looking over at McCoy with bright eyes, "A father, huh?"

Spock was puzzled. "That pleases you?"

Jim just looked at him and shook his head. To McCoy he said, "He's still a little fuzzy from pon farr. He'll catch on later."

"We'll need to be patient with him a little longer," McCoy said, "but then I'm going to insist that he cleans up his act."

At the gentle teasing, Spock's eyes began to glow. "Speaking of pon farr," his voice took on a husky timbre, "I feel the fires rising."

McCoy and Kirk laughed. "Good! Since everyone else is off having fun, I'd hate to see the time go to waste."

With his arms around his friends' waists, Kirk guided them back to their room. "Limits," he mused as Spock pushed him roughly back on the pallet. "That's

an interesting idea. How many people do you suppose never test their limits?"

There was no answer. McCoy seemed to be busy.

But the stolen hours of pleasure were short, and none of their problems had diminished when dawn came. The three men got up reluctantly, realizing that they would not have much time for each other until this ordeal was over. They dressed without speaking. At the door, Kirk stopped and turned to them. "Whatever happens, no one can ever take this from us."

"The commitments made in this room were only the acknowledgment of commitments that were made some time ago," Spock agreed. "To you, Jim, I think the first time I saw you smile. To you, Leonard, probably after our one hundred and first argument. There will be pressure, if we ever reach Vulcan, but I shall stand against it."

"Dammit!" growled McCoy, "I'm as stubborn as both of you put together, and I know a good thing when I come across it. I'm in for the long haul, though I'd just as soon skip your father and that high priestess."

"Okay," Kirk said with a grim smile, "let's go tear 'em up!"

When they got to the construction area, they found most everyone there, including Quanaang and Meador, working on the BARN, as the new ship had been dubbed.

When Sulu saw them, he broke away from what he was doing to confront them with another problem. "I've been studying what information we have available about this space." His face was crisscrossed with lines of worry. "The whole area is dominated by periodic storms and waves that originate within the anomaly." He shrugged. "Unfortunately the data was gathered by instruments of questionable reliability."

"Understood, Captain. Please continue," Kirk said.

"If Spock is up to it, I'd like for him to go over my figures; but it looks like the best time to try a run back through would be in two planet days. There will be a distinctive lull in storm activity at that time."

Handing the printout to Spock, Kirk asked, "I thought it took us several days to reach Haven once we had broken through."

"As we suspected at the time, our route was meant to be misleading. Traveling by a route known to the natives and at a reasonable speed, we could be in position to ride out on what I'd call the second incoming wave. Spock could probably describe it more accurately."

"I think not, Captain. Your description seems apt, and I can find no fault with

your calculations. The question would seem to be whether the craft will all be ready at that time."

Scotty's head popped up from a hatch. "Aye, but we'll have no time for a shakedown."

"When would the next lull be?" asked Kirk.

"Not for one hundred and fifty planet days," answered Quanaang who had walked over to join the discussion. "A time period that I find unacceptable. Now that I have decided to leave this place, I am anxious to do so."

"I'll agree that's a long time, but it would be preferable to wait than to commit ourselves before we are ready," Spock said.

Kirk sighed, understanding the Vulcan's naturally cautious nature, tinged with reluctance to leave this place where his new self and their unique relationship was so readily accepted.

"I say we shoot for the earliest date, but I reserve the right to make the final decision as to our readiness."

Quanaang bristled. He was used to being the one who gave the orders, but he bowed his head in salute. "I will rely on your judgment, little Admiral. Your people are good, and they would not follow a fool."

"We've got two days. Let's make the most of it."

As predicted the three men didn't have time for anything other than getting ready. But even with the crush of work, individual doubts crept in. They rushed headlong to place themselves right back into the peril that they had risked their lives to escape.

Plus, when they had come in, they only had to face a courtmartial. They would go back with the added burden of an inexplicable relationship. Even after brave words and braver intentions, how could they explain?

Quanaang and Meador faced similar doubts. They were to take the word of strangers and risk their very necks. Romulus, not to mention Vulcan, had a very long and unforgiving memory.

At an infrequent work break, Quanaang drew Meador aside. "For the first time since you brought me to this haven, my friend, I am afraid."

Meador looked up into his companion's face with clear eyes. "You said Kirk was no fool. He says that the Federation will offer you protection from the Romulans. They are eager to keep races from extinction whenever possible."

"I am not afraid for myself, but for you, my beloved, my prince." The big man took the Romulan's hand in both of his. "If I lose my life, it is as nothing, except a gift from you. If I lose you, it is everything."

The Romulan flushed green. "When I saw you in my uncle's house, you were but a skinny boy with huge hate-filled eyes and bony knees. The old man beat you senseless and still you would not serve him. He raped you in front of all the court, but you did not favor him with so much as a cry. I burned with shame for you and for my people, who had become barbarians. I knew then that you had the heart of a king. I could not know until later that it would be I who kneeled before you, begging you to take my body as well as my soul. We have had good years together, my liege. I regret nothing."

The big man crushed his companion to him. "No man deserves the joy you have given me. Surely, the gods will bless us for loving so well."

The Romulan did not answer as he breathed in the very essence of his lover. Gods were much too capricious to suit him.

In the final hours, while they were putting the finishing touches on the BARN, giving the other two ships one final check, simultaneously loading and storing the needed provisions, and billeting the natives that were going with them, they were approached by a group of those who were not going.

"You are a fool, Quanaang!" said a man called Legors. "I plead with you one last time not to do this."

With weapons at the ready, Quanaang strode forward. "The bigger fool would be the man who tried to stop me. My course is set, and I am anxious to be on it."

"When you leave, you will be taking strength that it has taken years to build. I offer you all my daughters and their entitlements, if you will stay."

Quanaang rubbed his big hands together, glancing at Meador who stood beside him. "It is too late, Legors. I am going, and you cannot even if you wished. True, we are taking strength with us, but you will build again as we did before." He shrugged broad shoulders. "If you wish, when we get to the other side, and see whether it be good or ill for us, I will send help to you."

Legors straightened his tall frame, "We have been on opposite sides of the table for many years."

"But we have always worked for the common good," said Quanaang.

The other man dropped his hands from his weapons. "If I tried to stop you, there would be blood spilled."

"Most likely yours and your sons'. Let us go in peace, Legors. For the good of all."

Legors turned without another word, and his men followed him. Kirk watched as hidden men filed in behind their chosen leader. He let out a deep sigh.

"I will send help back!" Quanaang shouted to the retreating backs.

"I think the sooner we get out of here the better," Kirk said to the big man as he turned back to the ship.

"I couldn't agree more," said Quanaang, his broad brow knitted in a frown.

They worked with increased intensity. Finally, it seemed that the last detail was taken care of.

"Are you sure, you want to ride the BARN?" Kirk asked Scotty.

"Aye, sir, they might be needin' me. Besides, it wouldna' be a very loud vote of confidence, if I didn't ride my own handiwork."

"I understand, but I'll miss having you on board."

"Aye, I judge one way or another it won't be a very long ride."

"No, one way or another, you're right."

As they lifted off, Kirk could see a forlorn band of people standing on a nearby hill. Which ones were the fools, he wondered.

They achieved orbit status, and took the opportunity to check one more time for a malfunction. He gazed back fondly on the grim, red planet. It was extraordinary only in what had transpired there between him and his friends. He sighed; it was perhaps the happiest time in his life.

After a check-in call from the other two craft, they set course straight for the anomaly at a brisk pace. As they got closer, space became murky and turbulent. The BIRD bucked and strained, already fighting for stabilization. The last trip was too vivid in the minds of his crew not to call for sweating palms and dry mouths.

"Scotty," Kirk called into the comm unit, "How are you holding up?"

Scotty's voice sounded worried, but then Scotty always sounded worried when it came to one of his engine bairns.

"Aye, we're tak'n a beat'n, sir, but she's hold'n!"

"Things are going to get a lot worse before they get better. I'll leave it to your discretion, but you can turn back at any time. I'll come back for you with a better ship."

"How're you go'n to do that, 'n you 'n jail!"

Kirk grinned. "Suit yourself. I've never seen a bunch of people more anxious for a little trouble."

"I would'na want to miss the fun."

"All right. Keep in touch."

As he broke the connection, his stomach went out from under him as they hit a space pocket. Clutching his chair, he watched in admiration as Sulu automatically compensated. With a flick of a switch he contacted Quanaang. "Better watch that next step. It's a doozy!"

"Thank you," said a grim-faced Quanaang, "but you're a little late."

"Any problems with your craft?"

"I heard your transmission to the BARN. You have so little faith in your engineer?"

"No, I just like to give people options."

"You did not expect him to turn around?"

"Shit!" Kirk bit his tongue as the BIRD lurched. "Hell, no! I didn't expect him to turn around! Have a good ride, and if you change your mind, I figure you've got at least ten seconds before you're irrevocably committed. Just let me know."

"Don't sit around waiting."

"Don't worry; I wasn't planning on it."

But Kirk was worried. It wasn't just his neck and his faithful few this time. They'd follow him anywhere, he knew. But there were all of the others: Quanaang's people, about four hundred of them, all just as loyal to their lord.

He was sure of the BIRD. He knew that barring a terrible mistake on their part, or some negative intervention of the fates, that they would make it. But he just wasn't as sure as Scotty about the other craft. They were old--well maintained, but still old. Then, there was the problem of their reception. True, Sarek had apparently anticipated their attempted return, but Kirk was still not absolutely sure about his motivation. Would the Excalibur be sitting there waiting for them? Oh well, he sighed; he, like Quanaang and Scotty, was committed.

He looked over to where Spock sat, busily feeding information to Sulu and the computers. Spock looked up for just a second with a raised eyebrow. He had questions, too.

The intensity of the external pressures caused by the anomaly, was building until Kirk was afraid his skull would crack with the strain. This was not like coming in, where they had simply ridden with the eddys and currents. This was more like paddling a canoe up the rapids underwater.

The engines strained. Racing, spinning, whining! An acrid smell prevailed the stifling air. They were burning up the engines and they weren't going anywhere!

"Where the Hell is the lull, gentlemen?"

"We may have been premature," Spock answered. "I suggest we not sit here ex-

pending our fuel, but allow the currents to carry us out, so we can reassess the situation."

"Sulu?"

"I agree. We're just getting flogged to death now." He shrugged, "If this is the lull, we might as well turn back. We can't make it."

Dragging a deep breath of putrid air into his lungs, Kirk put out an all call. "This is Kirk. We are to ride the currents out. I repeat. We are to ride the currents to a place where we can sit it out, and wait for the next lull."

"Aye, sir. We canna take anymore," came from Scotty.

"Are you giving up so easily, Admiral?"

"Damn right, Quanaang, and you are too unless you just want to die." Kirk glanced over at Spock, then McCoy. "I still have things to live for. Besides, I'm not giving up, just going to wait for a better time."

"What if there is no better time?"

"Then I'll give up. Quanaang, you swore to obey me in this. Ride it out and we'll give it another shot later."

Meador stood at Quanaang's shoulder. "My liege, I stand with you, but listen to Kirk. We too have things to live for."

Quanaang growled, but gave the orders to his helmsman to retreat.

The ships cut their power to just enough to remain stabilized. They shot out of the anomaly, bobbing around in the murky pool of space like small sticks in a pond.

"What's the story, Spock?" Kirk got out of his chair to walk down and look at what the Vulcan was working on.

"Sulu may have been right about the unreliability of the instruments that gathered our original information. With data I have gathered on this attempt, I am trying to extrapolate a solution."

"Right," Kirk said, wiping a small dribble of blood from his mouth. "Extrapolate away, but remember the longer we sit here marking time, the more precious energy we use. The BIRD is in good shape, but the other two craft are running on borrowed time."

"I shall endeavor to take all factors into account."

"Do that," but Kirk was inwardly pleased. This was more like the old Spock. The Vulcan had come a very long way since they had become lovers. He was almost completely restored. Kirk glanced over and winked at McCoy.

It was seven long hours later, before

Spock turned to Kirk, "You should inform the other craft to be ready for full power in nine point seven five minutes."

"Right," said Kirk and straightened in his chair. His butt was beginning to feel like he had lived all his life sitting in one position. Klingon ships were real beauties, but he couldn't say much for the chairs. "You heard that," he said into the intercom. "Get ready to go on my signal."

"Ready, sir," said Scotty. He sounded tired.

"As we are," said Quanaang, "but I wish to make it clear, that I intend to follow my own instincts this time."

"Have it your way," Kirk agreed reluctantly. "Scotty, proceed at your own discretion. Remember, if any of us makes it, we'll come back for the rest. A failure now does not mean you're out for the count."

"Aye, sir."

They started back into the maelstrom. At first, Kirk couldn't tell that this attempt was any different; but when they progressed to approximately the point where they had given up before, Kirk noticed a definite change. The ship was reacting to the thrust of her engines. They still bucked and careened, but they were inching forward.

"It is necessary to accelerate at this point, Admiral," said Spock. "We must reach the lip of the anomaly before the next wave begins, which I calculate to have five times the force of the present one."

"Give it all you've got, Sulu. Uhura, pass that information along."

Their progress seemed minimal. Time seemed to stand still. Kirk wiped beads of sweat from his upper lip. "How long have we got?"

Spock shook his head. "I am afraid the BARN will not make it."

"Shit!" Kirk muttered. He sat still for a second. Then in a deadly quiet voice. "Tractor beam."

Sulu turned around. "That will decrease our chances of making it by...." He turned to Spock for his usual recital of odds, but the Vulcan sat there with a wooden expression on his face.

Sulu shrugged and activated the tractor beam.

The BARN was big. She wallowed like a hog in a trough. The BIRD took the strain and kept on plugging away.

A call came in from Quanaang. "You won't make it that way, Admiral."

"It's too late. We're too far in to let them go. They'll get dashed to pieces by the next storm wave."

"They are not your people, Kirk."

"Piss-poor excuse," Kirk muttered. "Go on! You can still make it."

"You put me in a bad position," the big alien answered.

Kirk felt a lurch. "What the Hell was that?" he asked, though he already knew the answer.

"Tractor beam, Admiral, You are not the only hero."

A grin split Kirk's face. "All or none, eh, Quanaang?"

"All or none."

Even though their pace was slowed, it seemed that the three ships linked together lent stability, working like a trimarand.

"This could work to our advantage," said Kirk, leaning over Spock and his scanners. "If we have enough time," the Vulcan said quietly.

"You don't think we're going to, do you?"

A sharp shake of the head was all the answer he got.

"Quanaang, we're going to get hit with the shit in about 25 seconds. Hold on like a miser pinching a penny, or we're all down the tubes."

"Keep your own counsel, Human. This lord never abandoned any of his people to their own fate. That is why I was leader."

"Okay, here we go!"

The wave hit them like a brick wall. The ships creaked and groaned. Engines whined. Sulu steered them straight into a mass of Hell. But they held, breaking through like a surfboard.

"If we can maintain any forward progress we might just make it," Kirk said.

"Indeed, we might," Spock agreed. "Again it would seem that your ingenuity and random factors have combined to operate in our favor. If the BARN can just sustain the pounding."

Kirk glanced over at Sulu's gauges. "If we can just stand the pounding."

They fought every law of physics for what seemed hours, until they could see a small pinpoint of black, which they hoped signified normal space.

"Please! Please let us make it!" Kirk prayed silently. It was the only action left to him. They were completely helpless to do anything other than what they were doing.

A call came in from the BARN. "Sir, we're breaking up! You'd better cut us

loose while there's still a chance you can make it!"

"Fuck it, Scotty! We're going to make it--together!"

"You're being a wee bit stubborn, sir."

"That's what I get paid for."

He mopped his brow with his sleeve, as he looked at a rundown from Spock on the BARN's condition. "Shit."

There was no urging from any of the others to cut the BARN loose. "Just hold on, Scotty! Only a few more minutes!"

"Sulu, do we have anything left in the way of power?"

"No, sir, we kicked in the reserve boosters several minutes ago. What you see is what you get."

"Quanaang?"

"Nothing left, Admiral."

Kirk searched out Spock's steady gaze. Was it to end like this after all? Just when they had found the meaning behind their existence? He turned to McCoy. The same stoic courage reflected back to him from ice-blue eyes. Was it fair to resign Sulu, Uhura and Chekov to certain death, when it was obvious he could not save the others?

"Scotty," he said in a steady voice, "you didn't make the right decision this time."

"I understand, sir, and good luck to the rest of you."

"Scotty...."

"You better do it fast, sir, before we take you with us."

"Quanaang, we're cutting the BARN loose."

Quanaang did not have to search his companion for confirmation. The decision had been made for him almost a century ago. His own life he could forfeit, but if there was any chance at all, he had to try to save Meador.

"I am with you, Kirk. My respects to the brave souls on the BARN. Long will you be remembered before the shrines of our ancestors. May death come easily."

The two craft turned off their tractor beams. The combination of the release of their burden, coupled with the extra measure of power to the thrust engines, surged the ships forward.

Kirk concentrated his energy forward to their escape. It wouldn't do to look back just yet. But after the first burst, they still had not attained their goal. The blackness of clear space loomed like a gaping hole before them: so close and so unattainable.

Everyone sat mesmerized, listening to the strained song of the laboring engines, smelling the acrid evidence of their failure, waiting for an unpleasant death.

"Well," Kirk said in an expressionless voice, "we gave it our best shot."

"Sir," interrupted Uhura, who had been playing around with the long range radio, more for something to do than with any real hope. "I'm in contact with a ship. It's Vulcan. Sir!" she shouted, "it's Ambassador Sarek."

"Tractor beam aft," Kirk ordered, as he leapt to his command chair and pressed the intercom button. "Quanaang! Help is here! Initiate tractor. We're going to make it!"

Without any explanation needed, the Vulcan ship extended a lifeline in the form of her own very powerful and efficient tractor beam. The question was, whether there was enough of the BARN left to sustain life.

"We've got a critical situation with one of our ships," Kirk relayed to the Vulcan ship. "Please, begin beaming survivors aboard as soon as possible!"

"Affirmative, Klingon vessel. We can read your situation on our sensors." There seemed to be no surprise at finding three ships instead of one.

Kirk sagged into his chair. They were out of the anomaly. He wiped wetness from his eyes as he gazed at a familiar field of stars. "God," he whispered, "please let them be all right."

After a few shaky moments they heard Scotty's voice. "We lost some, sir. Some of the brave lads, who were on the peripheral, trying to hold the beastie together. But I'm sure Quanaang will be happy to know that we saved about 80 percent." The Scot's voice was choked. "I'll give a full accounting as soon as possible."

"Understood, Scotty, and...I'm sorry."

"You did your best, sir. We all did our best."

Sarek came on the intercom. "Am I to understand that my son is alive?"

"I am here, Father."

There was no sign of relief or any emotion at hearing his son's voice. "We will keep you in tow, Admiral."

"Fine with me, Ambassador. We're completely spent."

Kirk wasn't crazy about Vulcan. Had never cared for the planet, and only a very few of its inhabitants, namely the one sitting next to him with the blank face and the iron set of jaw, but this was beginning to look like a homecoming.

The Vulcans were very efficient. They medically checked their guests, and

had them fed and housed in record time. Kirk was glad to let someone else handle the details.

All too soon, he found himself in Sarek's house, sitting in Sarek's study. He thought he was too tired to do anything but breathe, but suddenly his adrenaline was pumping at an unprecedented rate. Spock and McCoy sat on either side of him.

"This may not seem like a propitious time, but I need to know the results of what I have done," said Sarek.

Kirk swallowed, "We're pretty done in. Can't this wait a few hours?"

"No."

Spock sat stiffly, almost catatonic, and a wall of rage rose inside Kirk. The bastard, to put them through this now!

Without asking permission, Kirk rose.
"We've become lovers."

Sarek closed his eyes, leaning his head back against his chair. Then, he sat forward as something clicked into place. "We?"

"Spock, McCoy and myself," Kirk affirmed.

After a moments pause, Sarek said, "Count on Spock to be unique. I expected something of the sort between you and the Admiral," he shook his head, "Somewhat distasteful."

Kirk was buying none of it. "Don't tell me you didn't expect something of the kind. After all, it was you who warned me that McCoy might have a problem."

Sarek leveled cold eyes on Kirk.
"Even by Human standards, multiple sex
must seem excessive."

"There is nothing distasteful or excessive about our relationship, Father." Spock's face was grim, his whole body so tense Kirk was afraid he might explode into a thousand pieces. "At any rate, we intend to conduct ourselves in a circumspect manner." He hesitated. "I... I will endeavor not to bring any further shame on my planet or my ancestors, but I am what I am." Glancing from Kirk to McCoy, "I have no apologies to make."

Sarek glared at his son with eyes capable of withering lesser beings. "You do realize that your ward, Saavik, carries your child."

Spock gave a convulsive intake of breath and Kirk reached over, placing his hand on his arm. "I feared this eventuality. My memories of what transpired on the planet are hazy, and that...being was not me, but I will do the right thing for the lieutenant."

"As it so happens, you might have a difficult time doing any such thing. She

has refused the hospitality of our home and
has taken herself to the temple for refuge.
For once there was a crack in Sarek's compo-
sure. "She does not want the family name.
She wishes to raise the child as her own,
claiming that the father was an unknown and
is now dead."

There was the slight
arm under

There was the slightest tremor in the arm under Kirk's hand. "Essentially she is correct. When I used her, I was an unreasoning beast. I fear she suffered at my hands. That creature no longer exists. It was driven out--first, by the high priestess, when she restored my mind from McCoy. Then, the remainder of the creature was exorcised by the ministering hands of my...." he reached to either side and placed his hands on his companion's knees, "lovers."

The word dropped between the
a stone. Kirk th

The word dropped between them like a stone. Kirk thought he saw Sarek flinch. For the briefest second, he almost felt sorry for the man. Sarek rose from his chair like an apparition. "I never more than this moment regretted my liaison with your mother."

"Leave Mother out of this!"

"Why should I? If I had not been so weak, none of this travesty would have happened!"

Spock was on his feet, with Kirk and McCoy hanging on each shoulder to keep him from launching himself at the indomitable Vulcan.

"This is a pile of shit," Kirk snarled. "You went to considerable trouble to snatch us out of the jaws of death, just to what?--bury us with your prejudices! I'll agree, if you had asked me just a few months ago, before we started out on this insane kaleidoscope of misery, what I thought about three guys marrying each other, I'd have laughed you out of the room. But, Sarek," Kirk favored the irate Vulcan with his "charm-the-universe" look, "this is no ordinary, cheap romance. And sex is the least part of it. We love each other." He put up his hand before the protests began. "If you don't know what love is, then you didn't deserve Amanda."

"I know what love is, Admiral. I also know what ruin is. Spock is not just an ordinary man that can discreetly indulge his perversities with no harm done. He is a Prince. The Architype of this world." Directing his implacable gaze to his son, "How do you think you will be able to stand in the temple and perform the sacred rights of your people without your sins making a mockery of all we hold decent?"

"Father," Spock cried brokenly as if he had been physically wounded. He stumbled and Kirk and McCoy helped him to the chair.

"Even after you fled Vulcan for Starfleet, I still had hope that one day you would outgrow your rebellious nature

and return home to serve your people. When I met Kirk, I realized where the true jeopardy lay. But you were celibate then. There was still hope. Then, after the disaster with T'Pol, and you would not accept another bonding, I knew your Vulcan nature was slipping. Still, when I would see you over the years, you were celibate. You had not given into the transgressions of your heart. Now, the brittle edge of anger crumbled, and the man collapsed into his chair in defeat, "Now, it is beyond us all."

"You knew what would happen when you arranged for me to take him into the anomaly," Kirk said in a soft voice full of dawning wonder.

"Yes," the admission was a sigh. "But at that point there was no alternative. You, the two of you, could restore him. I did not believe that the priestesses could."

"So you took a premeditated gamble," McCoy spoke up for the first time, "and now you're not happy with the results."

"Gentlemen," Sarek spread his hands in a gesture of defeat. "I have lost," a little of the accustomed fire was returning to his eyes, "but my son lives."

Kirk could not suppress a small groan. His son had not survived, and for a second he could taste Sarek's disappointment.

McCoy, the only one who seemed to have any reason left, pressed his advantage. "You really haven't lost, Sarek. No one except you has to know. As long as you're alive, Spock is free from obligations to Vulcan, and you're probably good for another fifty years or so, if you behave yourself. By then, given the discrepancies in life span, Spock may be a free man. You have your heir. That's what you've always wanted."

"Saavik is adamant that the child is hers alone," Sarek said in a voice dulled with pain.

"Bullshit!" chimed in Kirk. "All Spock has to do is tell her what the situation is. She'll do what Spock expects of her."

"It is wrong for you to assume any such thing, Jim," said Spock. "As her guardian, I was very careful to raise her to believe that she is her own person. That she owed debts only to herself. Not to any person," he glared at his father, "or to any planet."

"That's an admirable attitude, Spock," said McCoy, "but Jim is right about one thing. The girl is crazy about you. Leaving sex out of it completely, she worships you. If you ask her to let the child be raised as yours, she will."

"That leaves the question of whether I wish to submit a child to pressure that I barely survived, when I was only half-Human. How much more difficult for one that will be Human, Vulcan and Romulan."

For that no one seemed to have an answer or an argument. "Gentlemen, I have been remiss," said Sarek in a tired voice. "You have had a grueling experience, and you are weary. You may take the same rooms as before."

The three men rose and filed out without further comment. Kirk's head swam and his bones ached. He had lost men today. That never failed to hurt even when he did not know them very well. The unpleasantness with Sarek, though not unexpected, left him with a tight feeling in his throat as though he might cry. It made him so angry that the bastard would wound Spock so, and Spock with so little strength with which to fight back. Spock's personality was still as fragile as an eggshell; though strengthened by the knowledge of their love, it was still a tender reed caught in a flood tide.

Saavik? What to do about Saavik? He sighed, but he couldn't find any release for the tension. They reached the door to his room. When he had been here before he had shared it with McCoy. They all stopped.

"While we are in my father's house, we should not offend him." What upset Kirk was the look of confusion in Spock's eyes.

"Spock, I'm too tired to do anything but throw my carcass on the first available space. If your father's sensibilities are all you are trying to avoid, okay. Separate bedrooms. Tell me that is the only reason."

Reacting to the command tone, Spock straightened his shoulder. "I...I feel the need to meditate."

"What you need, Spock, is sleep," McCoy said, as he pulled the Vulcan into the room with them, "and for the past few weeks, we have all slept together like a pack of puppies in a hole. Now is not the time to separate."

Spock looked like such a little boy lost as Kirk and McCoy began stripping him of clothes that reeked of the acrid smell of the ship. McCoy got a damp cloth and started to bathe him while Kirk shed his own clothes.

"I am weary," admitted the Vulcan.

"It's going to be all right," murmured Kirk as he settled down beside him waiting for McCoy. "We still have each other. And, Spock, your father did admit that his major concern was that you were alive. He hurts that you're not what he wanted from a son, but he's damn glad that you're still alive."

"My father always felt the same way about me," McCoy muttered sleepily into Spock's neck. "He always wanted me to be a jock."

Even Spock smiled at that image as the three men fell into an exhausted, dreamless sleep.

**** * * * * *

Sitting in the stark visiting lounge of the temple, waiting for Saavik, Kirk wished he could be out battling Klingons. Spock was so still Kirk was tempted to check for a pulse. Sarek seemed impassive, but Kirk wasn't likely to buy that. McCoy, well, McCoy's eyes were crinkling blue. He almost seemed to be enjoying himself. A father? Kirk shook his head. The girl was likely to spit on them when she found out. Her situation was bad enough, and they were about to dump the big one on her.

She came into the room flanked by two priestesses, her head held high, her eyes flashing defiance. She was a tigress set to fight for her cub. Kirk felt his stomach tighten like it would before a battle. Sarek waved the two women away and they slipped quietly out of the room. This man has power, Kirk thought.

"I am pleased that you live," she said, encompassing her superior officers with the pronoun.

"Our problems aren't exactly over," Kirk said. "We still have charges to answer but with a little cooling off period, Fleet may be in a mood to be reasonable."

"I am sure you will be able to handle Fleet, Admiral." There was just a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

"There is a more serious matter before us," interrupted Sarek.

"If you are referring to MY child, that is not your problem."

"Lieutenant, I apologize for...what I did to you on Genesis." The words gushed out of Spock in a torrent, seeming to shake even the cool Saavik in their intensity.

"Oh, Spock," she cried. "There is nothing to be forgiven. I reacted as any Vulcan woman would under the circumstances. You were in pain. I gave myself to you."

"I acted like a beast."

"You were a beast," she whirled on Sarek. "That is my point. It was not your son that fathered my child. It was a creature. A dead creature. This child is mine, and I will raise it as I see fit." She looked at the others for understanding. "You know my background. I want this child to have all the love that I was denied. I want this child to be whole."

"That's what we want too, Saavik," said McCoy. "We want to love your child." He waved his arm expansively to include himself, Spock and Kirk. "We want the child to have a proper home, and to be raised by its...fathers."

Sarek choked. For once he seemed to be at a loss for words.

"I don't understand," she said, but the look on her face indicated that she might have some idea.

Kirk took a step forward, shielding Spock with his body. The girl deserved better, he thought. She loves the bastard, too.

"Lieutenant."

"You no longer need to use that title, Admiral. I have resigned."

"Saavik, then, it's better that I put this on a personal basis anyhow, since it is very personal." The girl intimidated him. She always had. Intrigued, but intimidated. "Saavik, Spock is the father of your child?"

He waited for a confirming nod from the girl. "This may be hard for you to comprehend, but Spock, well Spock and I," he gestured with his hand to include the Doctor, "and McCoy have," he paused. It was still hard even for him to believe. "...have entered into a...relationship."

He waited for that to sink in, but when there was no visible reaction, "As soon as we are able, we plan to have a formal contract drawn up."

The girl was unmoving except for the slightest droop of taut shoulders.

"We figure that makes us fathers, too," McCoy jumped in. His eyes sparkled and his face was covered with a guileless grin.

The girl shook her head, her eyes narrowing. "What perversities are you contemplating?"

Spock hung back, realizing how this must appear to one indoctrinated with Vulcan parochial values, but Kirk didn't have any choice. Now that McCoy had let it out of the bag, he had to continue.

"It's not as bad as it seems, Saavik. We've...been close for years, like brothers. When Spock died, McCoy housed his mind. Then he was reborn and, well, you know what he went through on the Genesis planet. It didn't stop there. Spock was vulnerable, open to influences he couldn't control." He sighed, "He went into another pon farr," he threw a look of apology at Sarek for openly discussing a forbidden subject, "and there wasn't anything left to do, but as you did...help him."

His expressive eyes pleaded for understanding. Saavik stared coldly back at him. Kirk sucked in his stomach and cracked his shoulders back. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not apologizing. In fact, I'm glad. We might have gone on best-friending each other for the rest of our lives. What we have now is... well, it's the best. And I don't mean sex," he threw that one in Sarek's direction. "We're one now. I can't explain exactly what that means, but there's nothing sordid or ugly about it."



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He stepped slightly closer to the pale, thin woman. "We want to extend our mantle to include you. No sex. We want you to become a part of us, our family, so that we can give this child all the love and protection it deserves. And you, too," he said shyly. "I don't mean that in any lecherous way. We want to take care of you."

She drew herself up haughtily. "I do not need your protection. I do not need anyone."

"Yeah," McCoy said. "I deluded myself with that line for about twenty years. Cost me a wife and a kid." With a look at his companions, "Could have cost me more if it hadn't been for a certain unnamed Vulcan." With a look at Saavik's face carved into lines of determination, he said softly, "Saavik, I'd...love to have a child. I never had time for my own."

As if shaking himself out of unreality, Spock said in a meek voice, "I, too, would... find it immeasurably beneficial to share in the upbringing of this child."

Kirk's eyes brimmed with a pain too sharp to be borne for long. "You know what a mess I made out of my chance to be a father. I'd be grateful for a second chance."

Saavik did soften for a moment. "On the contrary, Admiral, as with most people that you pull into your web, David...loved you in the end. You gave him the courage to die well."

Kirk graced her with a smile that would have melted lead, as he wiped moisture from his eyes. "Thank you."

With a lift to her chin, she asked, "What are my options, gentlemen?"

"We will draw up a contract, providing for you and the child."

"Conditions."

"No conditions," said Kirk without hesitation. "A relationship that relies on placing constraints on anyone isn't a true relationship. We will provide any sustenance that you and the child need for the rest of your lives. What we would like, I think," he looked at the others for confirmation, "we haven't even had a chance to discuss it. But something like visiting privileges."

At her look of doubt, "We're not going to embarrass the kid. We'll be like his uncles."

"And me," she asked.

"We only want the best for you, Saavik. Whatever that is."

She shook her head, and closed her

eyes. For the first time Kirk realized her vulnerability. She was ready to fight the galaxy, but she didn't have any idea as to the direction she wanted her life to take.

"Hey, kid!" he looked embarrassed at the slip. She wouldn't like to be thought of as a kid. "It's wide open for you. We'll support you all the way. Career? Marriage? Whatever you want as long as we get to be in on the baby's upbringing."

Sarek broke in. "What about Vulcan? What about our need for an heir?"

"Stay out of this, Father," said Spock. "I'll pay my pound of flesh from my own body. This child will not be subject to planetary blackmail."

As if Sarek had not even spoken, Saavik said in such a quiet voice the Humans had to strain to hear, "What if I want...to be a part of you?"

Spock, her mentor, stopped breathing. McCoy was the one who stepped to her and took her loosely in his arms, comforting her like a child. "You can have anything you want from us. We've got enough love to go around two continents. You need a father, we'll be a father. You need a friend, well, we're the best. You need-- Hell!" His throat closed. "If one of us ain't got it, the other one will."

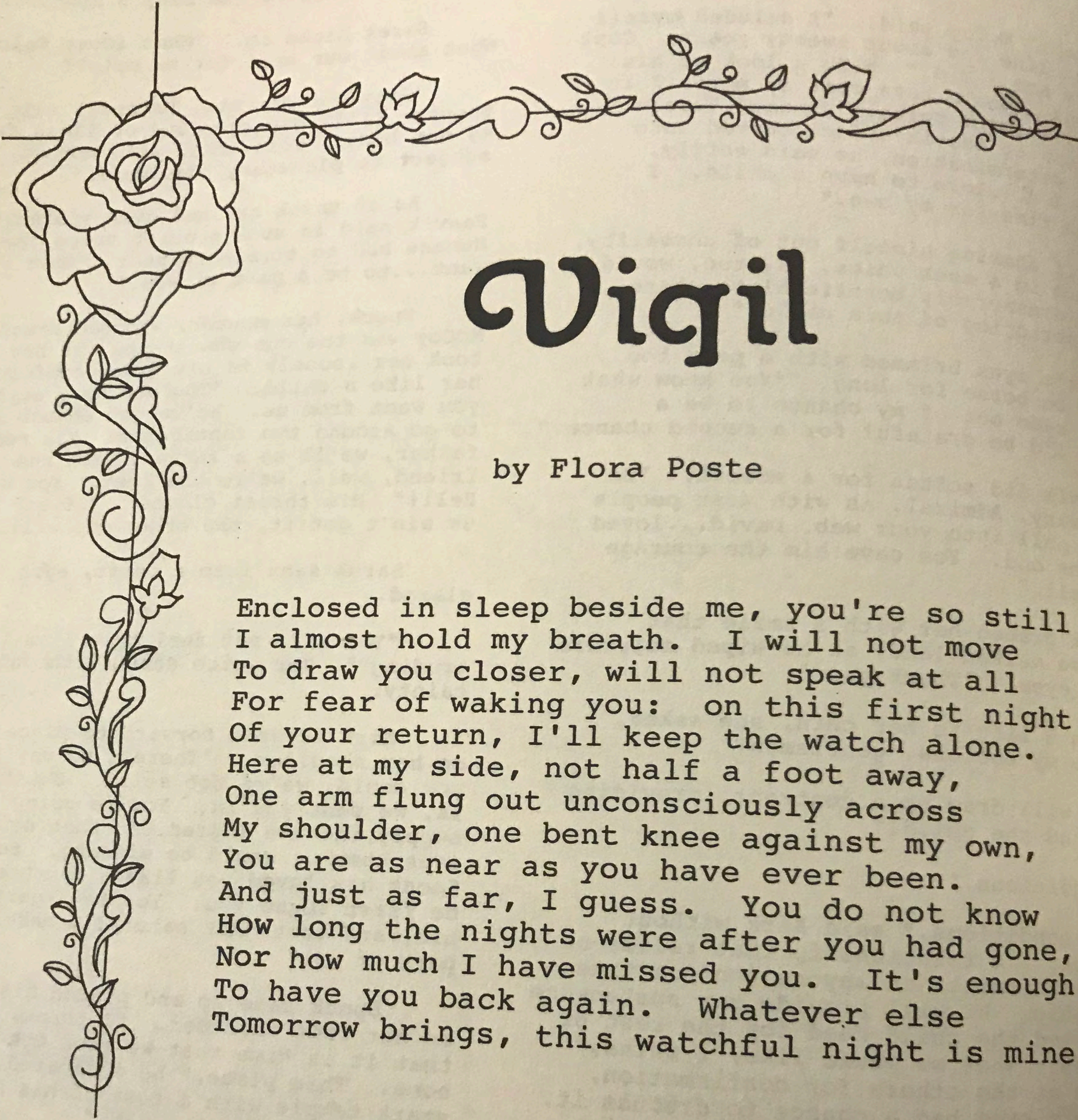
Sarek sank into a chair, eyes glazed.

"You will not feel that I am intruding?" Her voice shook with uncertainty.

Kirk stepped forward to place a hand on her shoulder. "There's no way that you could; we're too solid. But the fact is, we want you in. You're going to supply the one ingredient that none of us even knew we would be missing. Besides, Spock has loved you like a daughter since he first found you. You're a part of him, and that just naturally makes you a part of us."

Spock came up and placed his hand on her free shoulder. "I think, Saavik, that it is time that we took OUR child home. This place," he indicated the cold, stark temple with a toss of his head, "is no place for a child."

Saavik's eyes gleamed with unshed moisture as she walked between Kirk and Spock with McCoy trailing slightly behind. Sarek shrugged expansively, looking heavenward as if for strength. If he thought he was going to have a hard time explaining his son's actions, before, he might not even try now. With a deep sigh, he followed the unlikely group home.



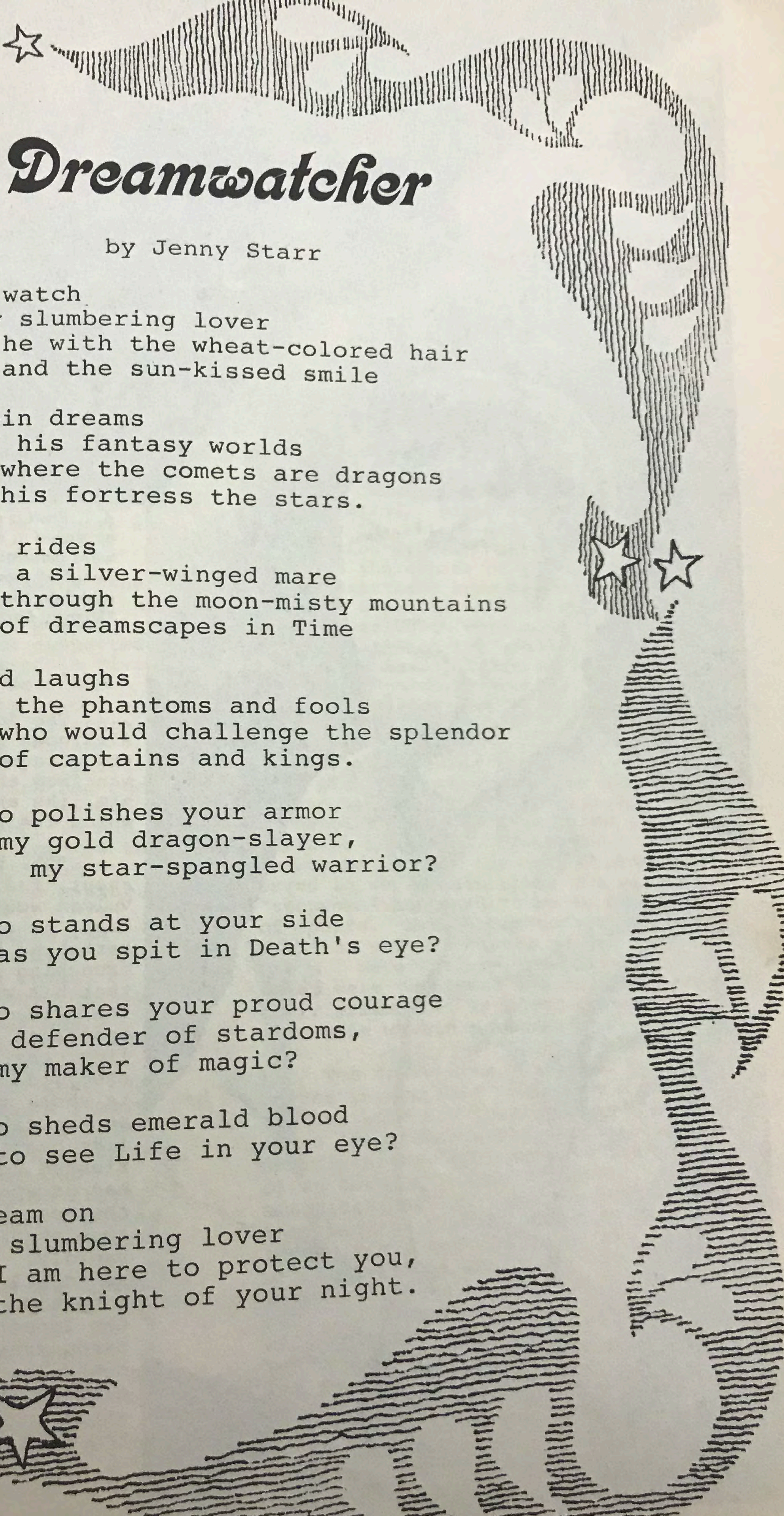
Vigil

by Flora Poste

Enclosed in sleep beside me, you're so still
I almost hold my breath. I will not move
To draw you closer, will not speak at all
For fear of waking you: on this first night
Of your return, I'll keep the watch alone.
Here at my side, not half a foot away,
One arm flung out unconsciously across
My shoulder, one bent knee against my own,
You are as near as you have ever been.
And just as far, I guess. You do not know
How long the nights were after you had gone,
Nor how much I have missed you. It's enough
To have you back again. Whatever else
Tomorrow brings, this watchful night is mine.







Dreamwatcher

by Jenny Starr

I watch
my slumbering lover
he with the wheat-colored hair
and the sun-kissed smile

spin dreams
of his fantasy worlds
where the comets are dragons
his fortress the stars.

He rides
on a silver-winged mare
through the moon-misty mountains
of dreamscapes in Time

and laughs
at the phantoms and fools
who would challenge the splendor
of captains and kings.

Who polishes your armor
my gold dragon-slayer,
my star-spangled warrior?

Who stands at your side
as you spit in Death's eye?

Who shares your proud courage
my defender of stardoms,
my maker of magic?

Who sheds emerald blood
to see Life in your eye?

Dream on
my slumbering lover
I am here to protect you,
the knight of your night.



TO GREAT LENGTHS

by A.T. Bush

A.T. Bush is a Mississippian whose stories have appeared in many K/S zines. Her early stories were generally light and humorous. "To Great Lengths", however, is one of her series of stories based on the universe depicted in the episode "Mirror, Mirror".

"...you will tell me!"

The door of the interrogation room slid open just in time for McCoy to see the enraged Vulcan pluck the cowering man from the chair and viciously shake him like an inanimate sack of manure--which the slaverunner certainly was.

"Oh, my...Sp...." McCoy began to shout, fearful that the out-of-control Vulcan would kill the scrawny man. He heard an unmistakable grinding crack of vertebrae breaking, bones binding, crunching against each other and knew that his warning was a moment too late. The already-dead body stiffened into one final convulsion and suddenly went limp, the head lolling back unnaturally, eyes wide open in terror. McCoy stared in shock and utter disbelief. He glanced at the glittering dark eyes that seemed like burning black coals in the green-flushed Vulcan face. A drop of spittle had escaped and spun a fine line into the neat beard. McCoy shuddered, squelched his apprehension and recovered rapidly. He had never Spock so enraged, so totally out of control, not in the long time they had served together in the Imperial Starfleet. He swallowed hard, making certain that his voice was controlled. "Spock?" He said quietly, alarmed that the Vulcan continued to stare in hatred at the bloody face of the dead renegade.

Spock simply loosened his grip on the thin shoulders and allowed the body to fold itself onto the blood-flecked

deck. He straightened his tunic, wiped his wet mouth, tidying his beard, and turned to face McCoy, once again in seemingly normal control.



In fact, Spock had not been "normal" since Captain Kirk and his chief guard, Farrell, had disappeared during a routine shuttle trip to Corridon. Ordinarily, the ISS ENTERPRISE would have been stationed in orbit, but to save valuable time, Kirk had ordered Spock to keep a rendezvous with the LEXINGTON which was ferrying re-supplies of photon torpedoes. Kirk did not relish ever being low on weaponry and Spock had complied with his superior's orders.

On return to the vicinity of Corridon, they had attempted to contact the Captain. No such contact was made and finally Spock beamed down to the dilithium broker with whom Kirk had been dealing. Indeed, Kirk and his guard had been there, negotiated the deal, and having plenty of time to spare before the return of the ENTERPRISE, had checked into a hotel. When last seen, they were in one of the gambling casinos usually favored by the wealthier miners and owners.

Spock had questioned the casino owner and workers and some did recall seeing the very handsome and wealthy-looking young man and his burly guard. Spock suspected that Kirk, incognito, had dressed in civilian attire, partly to prevent his business interests from being speculated upon; and partly to avoid advertising the presence of one of the most feared, and perhaps hated Captains in the Imperial Starfleet. The trail seemed to end when Kirk had been observed departing the casino. A search of his hotel suite indicated that it had not been disturbed. Spock had come to the conclusion that Kirk and Farrell had somehow been abducted outside the casino.

On planets where great wealth can be obtained by the turn of a card, or the turn of a rock that happens to reveal a fortune in dilithium, there always exists a profusion of crooks, brigands, and underworld figures. Spock let it be known that a small fortune could be obtained quickly and easily by anyone who knew what had happened to James Kirk. Spock's most trusted guard, S'Tinl, a formidable telepath, weeded out those individuals seeking the reward with nothing to offer but misinformation. Many of those, on first seeing the steel-eyed Vulcan hawk studying them, turned tail and ran for their lives.

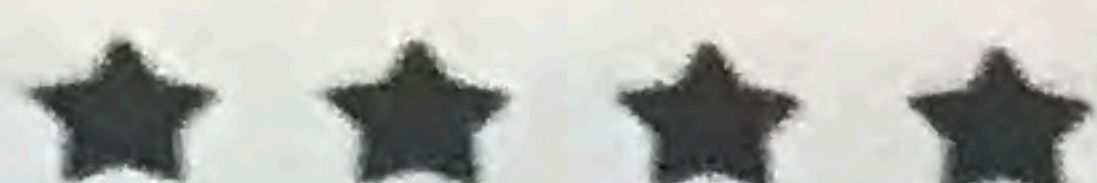
Finally, the temptation of the large reward brought forth a minor official from the Spaceport Dispatch Office. He had no direct knowledge of Kirk, but offered the very informed speculation that a pair of petty smugglers/part-time slave-runners had somehow kidnapped Kirk and Farrell and swiftly departed the spaceport with their "cargo" on the same night of the disappearance. He knew that they had paid a "bonus" to the Port Authority Official for his rather less-than-casual in-

spection and exit permit. Questioning of the Port Inspector brought no new information since the man could not swear that Kirk was, or was not on board the small freighter. Frustrated, and angered by the inability to gain concrete information, Spock paid half the reward, received additional data on the culprits and warped away from Corridon in search of the smugglers, Deveno and Brosfield. Some intuition told him that he was on the correct course.

In the meantime, from garbled space chatter, like two crafty wolverines, the two smugglers had somehow sensed that they were the objects of an intensive search and quickly disposed of their too-hot "cargo" to the first available buyer. Besides, once the stun-drugs had worn off, the two captives had been more trouble than they had been worth. The smaller one had even had the audacity to bloody Deveno's nose when the horny little slaver had demanded a blow job--and he had managed the violence even while in wrist/ankle restraints, which resulted in his getting several blows and a kicking. Next, they had tried to sabotage the ship's wiring, and the ventilation system. Deveno had not yet surveyed the extent of the other damage which might have been caused. Ferociously angered, Brosfield had administered a severe beating to both men, but concentrated mainly on the smaller man who was apparently the leader. Still defiant, the bloody prisoner soundly cursed him. Brosfield obliged him by knocking him unconscious.

After agreeing that they could not cope with the two disruptive prisoners, Deveno had beamed a short message to a spacepoint where he knew Orion slavers could be contacted. Their luck continued to run badly, for the only dealer interested in new acquisitions who were a bit "shopworn" happened to be an old enemy of theirs. Even the unscrupulous Deveno disliked selling slaves to the sadistic Orion. Nevertheless, rendezvous coordinates were confirmed and they transferred their prisoners, received payment, and were gone within minutes.

Two days later, they had found themselves inescapably snared in a powerful tractor beam and looking down the muzzle of an Imperial Starship's phaser cannon. Shortly after, they were in the clutches of an enraged Vulcan Commander. Both smugglers had continued to insist that they knew no Captain James T. Kirk, and indeed, they had not known the identity of their former captives. If they had, they would have killed him, and his henchman, and disposed of even the atoms! While trussed and strapped to a verifier scan, they were shown pictures of Kirk and Farrell. Their instant recognition of the two men sealed their death warrants. Brosfield had exchanged a significant look with Vaslo Deveno...just perhaps, a shrewd bargain. They had underestimated the determined, maddened Vulcan--Deveno, fatally!



"Yes, Doctor? As you can see...
Vaslo Deveno is of no further use."

"I do see...and Brosfeld is already scared out of his wits. S'Tinl is unable to initiate a meld. He says it's suicidal to even try. And drugs are ineffective, also. By the time the slavers are Brosfeld's age, their brain cells have been saturated with just about every illegal drug in the galaxy." McCoy could not help but notice the dead body seemed to be relaxing even more...almost puddling on the bloody floor.

"Then I suppose that...older methods shall have to be employed...until I know where the Captain has been taken."

McCoy sighed disgustedly. "Has it occurred to you that they don't know where he is? They are...were petty thieves, smugglers. They just happened to encounter Jim and Farrell at the aircar and, on the spur of the moment, somehow got the drop on them. That can happen, even to a defensive and alert guard. They saw a chance for a quick transaction and took it. He's certainly paid the price." McCoy indicated the dead man on the floor.

Spock clenched his teeth, annoyed that McCoy, who claimed to be Jim's friend, was so insistent that the trail had been lost. Spock would not, could not accept it!

"Perhaps, Doctor. However, the remaining one does possess valuable information. As you say, he is the older of the two, more experienced and knowledgeable of smugglers' and slavers' ways. And that is what is needed now. If he does not, in fact, know the precise location, he does definitely know the Orion who purchased Jim... the Captain and Farrell. He will know, or will have heard rumors about the Orion, thus some small bit of information will be gained."

"You're clutching at straws, Spock." McCoy perversely insisted on playing devil's advocate. It suddenly struck him how much Spock had looked like the mythical devil when he had first opened the door and viewed the horrible scene.

"Perhaps, but it seems that straws are all we have, Doctor. Please tell the guards to escort Mr. Brosfeld in here."

"Don't you want me to have this...mess cleaned up?"

Spock smiled slightly, deviously. McCoy gulped and glanced hurriedly down at the dead man. The blood had seemed to cool rapidly and congeal. The whole mess was terrifying! He wondered if Spock had deliberately "set the stage" by killing the man.

"No, indeed. Brosfeld will recognize that this is the last chance he will ever receive to...cleanse his soul. A final confession, so to speak."

McCoy didn't quibble further. He rushed

out to perform his tasks. He didn't want to know what would happen in there, never, ever. But he did want to know why Spock would be so ruthless, would kill just for a few scraps of information that might recover his Captain. But then, Spock had called him, JIM? Of course, he had quickly corrected himself, which made the slip even more significant.

There had definitely been a change of relationship between the two men, ever since that bizarre incident in the alternate universe some months ago. Spock and Jim had been "in briefing" in Kirk's quarters for hours after the return. Changes aplenty had occurred suddenly. Sulu had disappeared without a trace, his whereabouts known only to Captain Kirk--or perhaps Mr. Spock and his silent guards, rumored to have been the last to be with Sulu. Shortly after, Marlena Moreau had transferred off the ship. It seemed that there had been numerous significant changes and McCoy could only hope that they were for the better.

McCoy paused at the security brig and nodded to S'Tinl. He relayed Spock's orders and stood aside as they led/half-carried the terrified man from the holding area. Everyone looked as grim and determined to extract some bit of useful information as Spock did. Even Lt. Garrovick, who had been promoted to Mr. Sulu's former Security post, seemed intent on following Spock's directions. McCoy didn't know whether that was good or not...but he did want his friend back. He hardened his heart and took himself off to Sickbay, determined to help all he could.

Spock dismissed the stoic guards as they escorted the frightened man into the bloody interrogation room. He could literally feel the fear emanating from the gray-haired man. Spock allowed him plentiful time to stare at the dead man before ordering Brosfeld into the verifier chair. The man obeyed immediately. Spock stated his final proposition simply, firmly. Brosfeld did not even take time to bargain, but began to babble out everything he knew of the Orion slaver, Bundar. Spock keyed the recorder and listened carefully, prompting or asking for clarification only occasionally. Brosfeld was struggling to be specific, naming names, places, events. He was, indeed, confessing to a lifetime of crime, perdition and murder...with temporary immunity, granted by Spock, as acting Captain of an Imperial Starship. He finally began to falter, his immediate memory running blank. Spock ordered him escorted back to the brig, more humane treatment now guaranteed. He was instructed to immediately record everything pertinent that he happened to recall. Unknown to him, every surface in the cell was linked to the verifier scanner, which instantly indicated the truthfulness of his reports. He was inescapably trapped...and knew it.

Although still annoyed and dissatisfied with the information gained, Spock decided that it was time for action.

He strode to the bridge, ordering course changes laid in, and composing vague reports to Starfleet Headquarters, justifying why he must immediately warp to the very edge of Imperial Space to investigate matters of "Imperial" interest --his own!

He did not wait for permission, and after phasing the small freighter into space debris, set warp for the vicinity of Timorea, last-known home planet of the Orion slave dealer. He kept Lieutenant Uhura occupied with transmitting and receiving coded messages from Vulcan and her various embassies stretched across the galaxy. Vulcan traders were widespread, well-known and very prosperous, and had become and remained so because of their cooperative pooling of trading information--and sometimes gossip. And Spock, being of the high family that he was, had no trouble acquiring all the information available. And, too, he could afford the fees levied for transmitting such copious data.

Weeks later, with a virtual certainty that he was on the very heels of the Orion, Spock ordered the ENTERPRISE into orbit around Distern, the last planet that boasted a small Vulcan Embassy. Spock himself was operating the scanner, and thus was first to view the sleek spaceyacht that was waiting for him and his handpicked crew. He had plotted his strategy well and knew that any show of an Imperial Starship over Timorea, and the subsequent questions concerning a recently arrived slave, would be the quickest method of assuring Kirk's immediate disposition. If that had not occurred already! He could only hope that Jim still lived...by his considerable wits!

After a briefing at the Vulcan Embassy, where he received additional reports from advance operatives, he beamed onto the yacht to inspect the luxurious vessel from stem to stern. She was ready and perfectly equipped to his specifications. And he was also keyed up...ready to go!...frustrated by the feelings of helplessness, fear and the nearly unbearable feeling of loneliness. He missed Jim! Longed for him! Yearned for him! Wanted him returned, healthy and whole. Spock had firmly kept all thoughts of the torture that Jim might have suffered, or be suffering, from his mind. Such thoughts enraged him, caused him to lose control, dangerously. And now, above all else, he had to maintain cool, calm control. Jim's very life, his own, and his crew's lives depended on it.

That cool control was severely tested when the ENTERPRISE beamed over the selected crew and guards. One extra crewman had insisted on accompanying them and faced him down in the main lounge, which was the largest room on the yacht.

"I'm going, Spock. That's that! Besides, what if you need me...when you find Jim." McCoy didn't say more. Spock seemed quite alarmed without further agitation.

Spock glared at S'Tinl, who had obviously allowed himself to be bullied by the much smaller Human. A tiny movement of an eyebrow indicated that McCoy had been adamant, intractable. Spock forced himself to relax and consider the offer more seriously. He sighed silently, in capitulation. McCoy just might be needed if Jim was...damaged...severely.

"Very well, Doctor. You may accompany me. However, I will require instant obedience from you. No arguing, or protesting my directions or decisions."

"Whatever you say, Spock." McCoy smiled ingratiatingly, the picture of docile cooperation. He motioned for the two big, overloaded guards to follow him. They happened to be carrying a variety of medical equipment which he prayed would not be needed.

Spock sighed again and turned his attention to issuing orders and getting underway. Now, he could concentrate totally on finding and recovering Jim. The ENTERPRISE was under the capable control of Mr. Scott--whom Jim Kirk trusted implicitly--his guards and some of Kirk's retinue. The ship would follow them, carefully remaining out of Timorean planetary sensor range, but close enough, in case Spock needed her weaponry or reinforcement personnel.

On the yacht's small bridge, Spock stopped by Lieutenant Uhura, the acknowledged best communications officer in Starfleet, and accepted a stack of information tapes. He nodded his appreciation and continued on to the command alcove. He scanned the new information just now filtering from the operatives already dispatched to Timorea. There had been no confirmed sightings of the two Humans, recently arrived and for sale. Spock began to worry that the Orion had decided to vend his wares at some other location, or had discovered Kirk's identity, or had allowed his perverse sexual practices free rein and had used the Humans....

Spock struggled repeatedly to control his atypically overactive imagination; it interfered with his rest. Finally, he accepted the sleeping aids from McCoy, who had insisted again. It was true that Spock had slept very little since Kirk's disappearance, and that, only in restless tossing. His reassurances that, as a Vulcan, he could perform adequately for weeks without sleep did not convince his blue-eyed nemesis. He was quite literally forced to take the medication and found himself waking after eighteen full hours of dreamless sleep. He would not admit to McCoy that the rest had been sorely needed, but simply showed up on the bridge, looking and feeling more relaxed and refreshed. Not to be denied, McCoy simply grinned most smugly at him.

Some time later, Uhura appeared at his side and handed over a single tape. Her bright eyes indicated that the information was that for which he had been

waiting. Hurriedly, he activated the viewer...and there, a rather hazy, out-of-frame picture of two bedraggled men being led from the hatch of a shuttle... unmistakably James T. Kirk and Morrison Farrell. Several other wretched men, women, and children were led by their chains onto the tarmac of the spaceport.

"He's alive..." Spock murmured to himself, ignoring the chains that seemed to weigh the captives down. He closed his eyes for a moment of silent thanksgiving.

"Yes, sir...alive...and looks well, considering. Oh! Excuse me, Sir!" Uhura realized her familiarity and scurried back to her station. But she, too, had been worried about Jim Kirk.

Spock rubbed his beard, hiding his amused smile. He felt...elated, also. Now, there was truly hope!

News spread almost immediately and Spock did not have to summon his team. They were assembled in the lounge, most eagerly awaiting his briefing. Spock reassured them that Kirk still lived and gave the probable locations of his confinement. Their plan was clear: they would orbit the planet and rely on the operatives already in place to provide exact details. He reassured them that all was proceeding well.

And then, as though perversity had deliberately sabotaged him, the agent who had been following the Slave Dealer Bundar, was killed in a street robbery, a common occurrence in the disreputable, lawless city. And Bundar seemed to have dropped from sight, missing his habitual haunts, out of contact with his usual customers. Spock fumed and worried, and finally, fearful of remaining inactive too long, ordered his own operatives down to the city.

In disguise, Spock, accompanied by McCoy, and by his personal guards, checked into the finest hotel in the city, immediately letting it be known that he was there to indulge himself in the entertainments and all the perversions that could be bought by a very rich man. He was inundated by "knowledgeable" guides offering to show him the city--and its denizens and nightlife. He questioned them subtly, bestowing large tips for worthwhile information.

However, it was McCoy himself who heard the bit of gossip that led him and Spock to the Masque Disembo Club in search of Bundar who, rumor had it, owned a small percentage of the bizarre club and supplied most of the "performers". Spock had gone near green with fury when he heard of the atrocities committed in the establishment. He had unnerved the Human doctor so badly that McCoy had halted in the middle of the most gruesome gossip/report, fearful that the temperamental Vulcan would do something very rash...to him! He firmly believed in the old saw of the bearer of bad news receiving a harsh reward. McCoy decided to take his chances at some other time.

By night, when the club usually opened

for business, Spock knew almost as much about it as did the owners and operators. Dressed in special new garments, Spock, with his equally splendid guards, and the protesting McCoy in his new finery, arrived at the door only minutes after opening time. It had never been the type of establishment that catered to fashionably-late arrivals; indeed, the "show" began shortly after opening and was well-attended. Spock flourished a considerable wad of the preferred currency and was ushered into the well-guarded lobby. The dungeon-like motif was prominent throughout the building, and, indeed, the main show floor was below street level. The regular patrons obviously preferred the gloomy "mood" atmosphere.

Spock motioned his own guards into their prearranged positions at strategic points--just in case all did not go peacefully. He preferred a simple transaction, without phaser play, in which case someone could be injured or killed. He could hear McCoy swallowing loudly, nearly stumbling as they followed their escort down the stairway. They emerged into a dim, cavernous, dungeon-room. The stone walls were decorated with torches and various modern and ancient instruments of torture. Some of them looked well-used, and stained with blood. McCoy was gulping even louder and Spock caught the trembling arm, urging the Human to a nest of black-plush cushions strewn on the carpet mat behind a small brazier/table. Playing his role well, Spock shouldered out of his long cape and tossed it down onto the pillows. He could hear the attentive patrons commenting on his garments. He knew that he looked positively sinister in the supple, skin-tight black leather jumpsuit, studded with green flindels. He was dressed perfectly for the location, and the activities that took place there.

"Sp...Uh..." McCoy gulped and fearfully eyed the wicked-looking Vulcan. "You're scaring the shit out of me!" McCoy hissed, still standing as Spock gracefully folded to the cushions.

"Shut up, sit down. You will not address me by name." Spock looked around casually. The room was still uncrowded and no one was near enough to have overheard their comments.

McCoy plopped down and pushed his own cape off his shoulders. He felt ridiculous in the black/silver garment, despite its suitability. A little golden sash was all right, but silver? Utterly gauche! He was still fussing with his cape when he noticed the bizarre little dwarf-waiter hovering by Spock's head.

"Uh...I'll have a double...Finagle's Folly, waiter." McCoy said, rather loudly, calling Spock's attention to the intruder.

Spock looked utterly blank, unable to recall a suitable drink for himself.

"My friend will have the same."



McCoy ordered quickly, peeling off some bills, not even counting them before throwing them on the miniature tray. It was not his money, after all. He noticed that Spock's hand was shaking ever so slightly when he tidied his beard. And Spock noticed him noticing.

"Uh...I know you're not...scared for us...but for Jim." McCoy said softly. He was expecting an immediate rebuke, instead Spock frowned, studying him intently. "I'm his friend, too. I know that...."

"...that we are...lovers." Spock whispered, finishing the sentence.

"Yeah, took me a while to figure it out. For quite some time now?"

"Yes, we...trusted. I fear so...for him. What might have been done...."

"You've got to be prepared--for anything. It's a possibility that he's been...badly beaten, raped...maybe even...tortured. But you know how...strong, how stubborn he can be when he's angry. And he'll be plenty angry! You recall that Deveno and Brosfeld had their hands overfull with him. He's probably caused even more trouble since then if they haven't kept him heavily drugged... like a...zombie...." McCoy's low voice degenerated into a mumble.

"If they have...mutilated him...I will kill them all!" Spock vowed.

"No, no, Sp...Uh...doesn't work that way. The drugs make them...zombies, sex slaves...deadens the will. You've seen the Timoreans, they like...docile...they're so huge...and they love to fuck. Women, men... animals doesn't matter to them. They rip... open anuses, blood...everything, everywhere."

"Stop! I beg you...." Spock's imagination was rapidly out of control.

"Sickens you, too. I just can't understand why anyone would want to watch it, especially more than once."

"Neither can I. Why do they...pay such exorbitant amounts to support clubs such as this?" Spock had discovered that there were many such entertainment establishments.

"Perverts will work harder to pay for their perversions than they will for food or shelter. Always been true...always will be."

"The cost of replacing slaves alone.... But surely they receive some care."

"Oh, yeah, that's part of the overhead, I guess. And they've developed specific medicines...promotes healing and blood replacement. There's even...rumors of a regenerative drug." McCoy caught the fleeting look of disgust on Spock's face. "You'd be surprised at how many physicians, researchers, even therapists are...sadists. They become involved in the medical professions to... see and feel the blood...inflict pain. Some have been known to...get carried away with

their perversions...and commit horrible atrocities."

"You would be...interested in these drugs?" Spock indicated that the diminutive waiter was returning. They waited until he had served the drinks and departed.

"Certainly, I would be interested. But I'd try to use them for...a higher purpose." McCoy smiled to see the suspicious expression on the Vulcan face.

"Perhaps...they can be secured." Spock's operatives had acquired a "favored customers list" and McCoy was quite correct: many physicians and researchers names appeared as club habitues.

"I'd appreciate it. Might be helpful...with...." McCoy felt it his duty to prepare Spock for the worst, just in case, but he couldn't bring himself to say Jim's name.

"I shall arrange it...immediately." Spock motioned to his nearby guard. A few words into the pointed ear and the guard departed, apparently unhurried, but moving swiftly. He was back at his station in a short while and nodded acknowledgment to Spock's inquiring eyebrow.

McCoy noticed the flurry at the stairway entrance and nudged Spock.

"That's got to be Sluthor. He's notorious. He pays for a lot of the most awful....At one of his drunken parties, he thought it would be amusing to see if a slave could really be fucked in his ear. He had a hole punched in the head...." McCoy had heard that account from someone who had been present.

Spock felt sick as he studied the corpulent, dissipated looking Orion.

"One night...he ordered a pregnant slave. Nobody could figure out what he wanted with her. She was huge with child and he wanted to see if Fredo, that's the biggest Timorean who performs here, could pull the baby out of her. He... Sluthor obviously instigates a lot of the more...perverted acts around here. He's the biggest...exhibitionist--but all of them are."

"Jim...Oh...." Spock was becoming more frightened than ever.

"Not him. He's new. They would take it easy on a new arrival...for a few performances, then when he was scarred, or very badly mutilated...no longer handsome, then they'd...do something truly horrible."

"I cannot bear to...think of it." Spock suppressed his shudder.

"I know...I know. We'll get him back!" McCoy whispered his reassurance for Spock's benefit and his own.

A short time later, a gong sounded and the stage area was lit by a modern lighting system. Spock became aware, almost subliminally, of a low drumbeat and music coming from somewhere beneath them. It gradually grew louder and then stopped abruptly as a near-naked Timorean appeared from behind the stage drop. Spock had never seen such a costume, composed of wide leather straps that crisscrossed the giant chest and circled a slim waist only to reappear between the legs, displaying and framing the over-large genitals, which appeared even more grotesque because the Timorean was completely hairless. He was the announcer/auctioneer/performer and explained, for new visitors, the rules of the establishment. For a price, the high bidder could dictate the performance he wished to see, or participate in. Spock glanced at McCoy, who seemed to be drinking in gulps. He touched the nervous man's arm, soothing him instantly. They both turned their attention back to the stage. An idea had come to Spock, but he would wait to see what happened. Indeed, Kirk might not even be available and they would have to wait several nights for his appearance. Spock already knew that he could not risk a direct raid on the too-well guarded slave quarters. Kirk would have to be brought into the relatively safer public arena.

He sat quietly, feigning mild interest as two performers were led onto the stage. The harsh, drab iron chains had been replaced with gleaming gold. Only the best for the perverts of Timorea, it seemed, unless they chose the sinister black metal, which indicated a "final" performance. Spock watched the tall, golden blonde woman glance fearfully into the audience. He could detect several bruises and scars along her naked flank, skillfully laid on in some pattern.

"My work!" Spock heard from the brutal braggard, Sluthor. Spock could detect a pungent aroma and watched the four males dispense a rounded packet. It could only be Vandja, an insidious drug, outlawed all over the galaxy. This planet was, indeed, a vile sinkhole of depravity.

The bidding began, but Spock remained quiet, studying the procedures and the bidders. The blonde woman eventually ended up performing in an unimaginative six-way sexual orgy. The only oddity was the appearance of their waiter, the dwarf, who seemed to perform with great enthusiasm and much cruelty. Apparently improvising, the small, misshapen man had brandished what appeared to be a large kitchen knife, threatening the bruised, pink tipped breast of the sperm-coated woman. Spock had held his breath, fearful that she would be further mutilated. The waste of it all filled him with abhorrence. She was led from the stage, panting with exhaustion.

The next performer was a well built older man, with many disfiguring scars all over his body. Spock could not fathom how any being could survive such multiple wounds. The marked flesh seemed to excite the audience and the bidding rose steadily as an inebriated spectator kept insisting that he wished to carve his initials in the

sturdy thigh. Spock feared that, if the man won the bidding, and once the excitable crowd smelled the hot blood.... He, too, began to bid for the man, surprising McCoy completely.

"What are you doing?" McCoy hissed.

"Calming their nerves, hopefully." Spock replied, annoyed by McCoy's interruption of his concentration. He held up his hand, increasing the bid. The auctioneer called for more bids, but the drunken man's friends had subdued him, or he had passed out. Relieved, Spock quickly allowed someone else to outbid him and dictate the performance. He was dismayed when the man excitedly called for Fredo and the kinkocho-hide whips.

Spock was near ill by the time the lengthy performance finally ended. The blood-smeared slave had an array of new scars on his sweaty, gleaming body. Even Fredo's massive cock was streaked with blood and feces from the brutal anal assault. After unchaining the unconscious slave, a brief intermission was called in order to clean the stage and remove the bloodstained cross.

Spock had thought himself inured to the brutality but was forced to stare blindly during the next performance. A small Human girl was led onto the stage, terrified and crying, her quivering little naked body oiled all over--even her short-cropped black hair. The auctioneer gave specific restrictions, since the management intended to use her several times before the harsh treatment cost her life. Much frantic bidding went on, the jaded men seemingly obsessed with handling her hairless flesh. Spock could sense that the sickened Doctor was about to create a scene and protest the proposed perverted acts and clamped a hand firmly onto the thin arm. He squeezed significantly.

"No, Doctor. The child...was in the shuttle with Jim." Spock whispered. He had studied that picture in minute detail.

"But...but...Oh, my God! She'd be better off dead." McCoy choked and fumbled for his drink.

"There is nothing that we can do for her...now."

"I know. I know we can't...save them. Maybe...some of them even deserve to die like this...but not that innocent...." McCoy cringed as he heard the child's thin voice cry out in abject terror. He glanced up at the stage and the fat, bearded man who bit into the plump hairless pubis. He could see the thick tongue laving her pink vagina, the pudgy beringed fingers kneading her flat little chest, pinching the tiny nipples. He shuddered with revulsion... and wondered if the man were the same who had, purportedly, strangled a boychild who had been forced to impale himself. The death-shudders had triggered the man's climax. A vivid picture of the death of

Deveno came to mind. It was not the same thing!

After forcing the tiny hand around his erection, the man orgasmed and panting and redfaced, resumed his seat in the audience. McCoy could hear his friends complimenting his fine performance. A waiter hurried over with damp towels for the man's fastidious comfort. McCoy felt sick and absolutely infuriated. He secretly hoped the fat son of a bitch had a heart attack and swore he wouldn't lift a finger. Indeed, he would happily help send him on the way to Hell! His heart bled as the child was led away, tear streaks marring the lovely face which would never be innocent again.

There was a considerable interval before the gong sounded again. Spock steeled himself and watched McCoy hurriedly return from the relief facilities.

"Tonight! A virgin performance... something very special!" The announcer built the crowd to anticipation. The lighting changed from the soft pink used for the child, to a sungold, almost daylight hue for the slave appearing next. The curtain parted and two large Timoreans emerged, chains of gold in their hands as they led...unmistakably James T. Kirk onto the stage! McCoy's shocked gasp of recognition could have easily been mistaken for one of admiration for Kirk was striking in his oiled, golden nakedness. Although his head was held high, there was a disturbing dullness to the eyes. Drugged! McCoy concluded immediately. He glanced at the totally entranced Vulcan sitting beside him. He had never seen such an expression on Spock's face; the Vulcan was hopelessly in love with Jim Kirk.

Spock felt his heart nearly stop at the first sight of Jim. He quickly regained control when the two large men turned Kirk, displaying his perfect body. But Spock had noticed the dark bruising along the strong jaw. Yes, Jim had fought and would keep on fighting--but he was whole, and he was here!

"Remember, he's stubborn. They couldn't have subdued him easily. They've used drugs on him. Better than beating him too severely and taking the chance of spoiling a virgin performance." McCoy deliberately did not allow his voice to linger on the word "virgin". It obviously simply meant a "first" appearance in the stinking sex pit.

Spock nodded and swallowed hard, near sick with anxiety and fear. Surely the slavers had discovered that Kirk was not virgin. He had no time to think on that as the auctioneer began his spiel, coaxing, cajoling, urging the bidders ever higher. Spock bid laconically, displaying only casual interest despite his avid enthusiasm. The alert auctioneer somehow sensed his real interest and focused on him. Spock finally realized that the experienced professional could not be fooled. Deception abandoned, he began to bid in earnest. Sluthor, who loudly professed to have a great interest in "new dishes", topped each one of his bids. Unfazed, Spock continued and finally the price was enormously high and Spock began

to hear astonished mutterings from the crowd. Indeed, for the amount now bid, he could have purchased, outright, the most beautiful slave boy or man on the market. He stood up, inquiring if the slave was for sale...at that price. He was shouted down as a "selfish pervert" who wanted the beautiful slave for himself. Despite the vociferous crowd's displeasure, the auctioneer was very interested in the huge offer. Obviously, Kirk had been more trouble than even they had suspected, but was too valuable to destroy. Spock raised the bid again generously, making the offer irresistible. Surely, the owners of the establishment would be highly displeased if the offer were rejected. And the auctioneer was worriedly considering just that as the audience's booing grew in volume. He finally shouted them down.

"A...sporting proposition, gentlemen! If the...kind, and generous gentleman wishes to purchase this slave...at the last figure...his offer is accepted... only, if he agrees to allow the beautiful slave to perform for us, just this once... before he is removed from the premises. Is that acceptable?"

The crowd yelled their acceptance of the terms and looked at Spock, who was still standing, unsure of his course of action. He looked at Kirk again. The man was worthy...of anything in the galaxy!

McCoy held his breath, wondering if Spock had the courage to accept such terms. If he refused, there might be a riot.

"Very well. I always accept such... sporting propositions. But I wish it understood that from this moment..." Spock tossed a large sack of currency to the auctioneer. The man peeked quickly and nodded enthusiastically. "...I own the...slave. No one else is allowed to touch him! I shall perform with him... acts of my own choosing. And..." Spock tossed another smaller bag of currency. "...drinks...or the preferred intoxicant for the house!" The beginning boos and jeers suddenly became enthusiastic shouting.

"Call for stimulants." McCoy hissed at Spock. "He won't recognize you, otherwise."

Spock nodded understanding and picked his way through the audience and the scurrying, busy waiters. He nodded to his guard in passing. The tall Vulcan was already at alert. Farrell also had to be close by and the guards had a legitimate reason for being backstage in order to protect his "master's" recently-acquired slave. Farrell would be abducted immediately after Kirk was removed safely.

"Stimulants." Spock demanded. "I do not take a man who cannot feel the pain. Chain him for now...if you fear..." The attendants hurried to comply. An injection hissed against Kirk's bicep.

Spock heard renewed jeers from the ungrateful crowd, who were accepting his

drinks! He sighed and closed his eyes a moment, concentrating, controlling his pounding, excited heart. He heard jeers of "puny Romulan, little green cock, can't get it up" and various other denigrating remarks. It did not seem to bother him. Very slowly, he ran a finger under the jewel-studded seams and the garment began to fall away in pieces. He stroked himself once, instantly springing to erection: and standing in the high black boots, with only a jeweled collar around his neck, he turned slowly, displaying his arousal, his size. He glanced down at himself, cock protruding massively from his groin. A surprised silence had come over the room--which wouldn't last, of course. He looked down at Kirk again, the beautifully-rounded ass in full view of the audience. Spock tightened his buttock muscles, causing his cock to seem to jerk in eagerness. A little gasp went up from the audience. At that moment, he leaped onto Kirk's back, catching his weight easily on his hands. He lowered himself, rubbing sensuously along the oiled flesh. The induced erection quickly became real! He noticed feet in his line of sight. Intolerable. He could afford no such distractions.

"Remove the chains...get off this stage...immediately." He ordered, nuzzling into the soft hair. Kirk did not smell quite clean, but he was beautiful...so very beautiful. Spock squirmed sinuously, opening his legs to display his cock settled into the crack, pressing into the softness of the plump cheeks. He heard the clink of chains being dropped and hurried footsteps vacating the stage. On the pretext of fondling hair, Spock eased a hand up to Kirk's head and initiated a light meld. The drugged state hampered his efforts. He managed to institute a control meld...just as long as he was in physical contact. And he did not intend to let Jim go! He could sense/feel that Kirk was rapidly becoming aware, was stiffening muscles to throw him off.

"It is I, Jim...my love." Spock whispered into the beautiful ear. He licked it elaborately, tongue extending much more than normally. He heard the appreciative groans from the audience.

"Spock?" Kirk croaked, barely able to speak but recognizing that deep, loving voice, the body, the gentle tongue in his ear. "What?"

"Shhh, do not speak...our lives depend on it. Trust me...let me control...I must be brutal...there might be...slight pain."

"Like it like that...sometimes." Kirk murmured groggily.

"Sssh, obey." Spock could have kissed him wildly; instead, he reinforced the order with a mind touch. He could feel the total trust and acquiescence--and the puzzlement. Jim did not know where he was.

"Yes! Struggle...push it up to me." Spock said more loudly. Kirk responded with a fierce, upsurging movement, which Spock "subdued" after a brief display. "You

sweeten the victory. Subjugating you will be my pleasure." Spock began to "struggle" with the resisting Kirk, seemingly in earnest. He did not let himself remember all their delicious mock battles for he wanted no associations of this time to ever spoil their future playful times.

Kirk was playing his part admirably, wriggling, grunting, trying to escape. Of course, he could not. Spock was Vulcan and much stronger than he. He concentrated on following the whispered or loudly spoken directions and on subduing his beginning erection. As awareness fully returned, he began to realize just what was happening, and he was remembering. He wasn't certain until Spock turned him to face the glittering eyes in the audience; those sitting closest were licking wet, drooling mouths. Kirk was stunned for a moment, then Spock urgently whispered for him to continue the struggle. He did, trusting Spock and whatever plan he had conceived for them. He managed to loose one hand and slapped at Spock. In return, he received a cuff across his mouth, finely calculated to be just hard enough to cause his lip to bleed...which Spock knew that they did very easily. Spock's eyes darkened with sorrow and Kirk grinned gamely, adding saliva to the few drops of blood before letting it all run down his chin, looking much worse that it was. He half-turned in Spock's hold, toward the audience and the sight of his blood sent a moan around the room. Now he knew how to play them. He fought and slapped at Spock and managed to claw the thin skin of the collarbone. The green blood seeped slowly and then began to run freely as Spock increased the flow, reading Kirk's intention. They surged together, struggling fiercely, chests rubbing together, red and green blood smearing them both. the now-excited crowd shouted exhortations, encouragement, advice! They fought harder, Spock's enormous cock seemingly being rubbed all over Kirk's writhing, oiled body. The sweat, oil, and heat from Spock began to get to Kirk, regardless of where they were. He managed to place his mouth near Spock's ear and whispered in a breathless rasp. "Better fuck me...or else!"

Spock could feel the erection developing. He caught a glimpse of Kirk's face and there was the same sexy challenge he had seen so many times before, and unbelievably, a trace of humor at their predicament, dangerous as it was. Spock pretended to cuff him again, caught the forelock and deepened the meld swiftly. He took complete control. He flipped Kirk over, already stabbing his cock at him, and rammed it in. The oil made insertion so easy, so smooth, as though Jim had prepared especially for him. He actually heard the combined gasps of the audience, almost certain that he felt their hot breath on his neck.

He turned Kirk all ways, showing his complete mastery of the Human and fucked

McCoy sat stunned, not only at the apparently brutal rape on the stage, which surely was feigned, but also surprised that Spock could "perform" so uninhibitedly. He had felt acutely embarrassed, looking everywhere but at the stage. He had looked back just in time to see the Vulcan snap Kirk's neck--or seem to. McCoy jumped to his feet, startled in reality. Had Spock, in some Vulcan sexual frenzy, actually killed? McCoy's wide blue eyes were drawn by sheer force-of-will to Spock's. Those black eyes were telling him something. McCoy bullied through the now-standing crowd and onto the stage. He pushed the other people away, allowing no one to touch Kirk's limp body. He "forced" Spock to lay Kirk on the couch at the back of the stage. The "examination" was brief, barely laying-on of hands.

"Refund the money! Give it back!" Someone in the crowd roared. The auctioneer and the crowd were quickly in a heated shouting match. They had apparently been well-satisfied with the performance.

The auctioneer was suddenly all friendly, fawning over Spock obsequiously. Obviously, the "Romulan" was a fair and very wealthy customer to be treasured. "Oh, sir, thank you...may I dispose of the body for you?"

"He's a perverted alien...putrid cannibal...filthy pervert," came from the suddenly moral crowd. They moved back from him as though he were evil.

Moments later, McCoy and the guards were crowded into aircars and lifting from the planet. The blanket-wrapped Kirk refused to relinquish his hold on

Spock's neck. McCoy couldn't blame him, but still he felt a bit embarrassed to be witness to such overwhelming love. He cleared his throat, uncomfortable with the silence.

"Uh...uh...well, I'll just bet that show won't be forgotten soon." Before the nervous comment was out, McCoy knew that he had committed a terrible faux pas.

Kirk held out a hand and gripped McCoy's tightly. A forgiving grin told him it was all right. They were both aware of his predicament.

"Never to be repeated," Spock said in a decisive tone.

"Never!" Kirk echoed grimly, locking eyes with the determined Vulcan. They nodded in perfect, silent agreement.

McCoy stood on the bridge, watching the red-hued planet of Timorea. Inexplicably, Spock had beamed down the slaverunner, Brosfeld, shortly before they had broken orbit and moved into space. The space-yacht reposed in the ENTERPRISE's hangar deck, looking out of place. McCoy would be glad when they warped away from the Hellhole below them. It couldn't be too soon. He sighed in despair, thinking of the tortured, maimed,...he couldn't forget the tiny girl, crying.... He tried to concentrate on the orders being given on the bridge, but he did not see Kirk's determined finger depress the firing button. He did see the vile planet explode, disintegrating into space dust. Somehow, he didn't feel any regret.

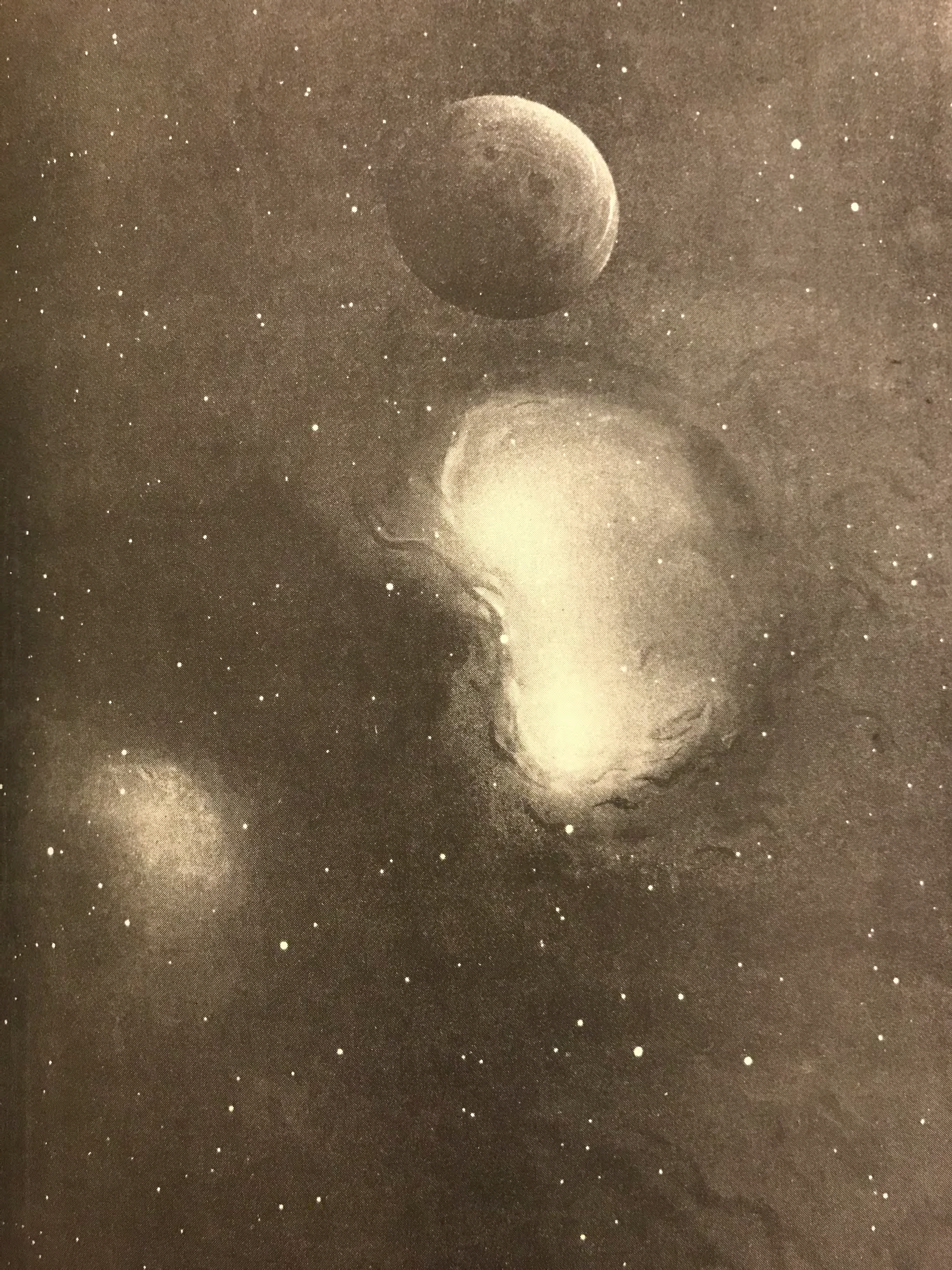
The Contributors

A fan of Star Trek since its first episode was aired, B.L. Barr discovered fandom and became involved in it after seeing ST II in 1982. Married, mother of a five year old boy and two year old girl, she lives in Massachusetts. She has a background in medical editing, and has had things appear in approximately 35 fan publications. One of the few Star Trek fans who does not own even one cat, her other hobbies include Starsky & Hutch and Simon & Simon.

Dorothy Laoang lives in Rockville, Maryland. She is a substitute art teacher, a freelance illustrator and graphic designer. Her unique artwork style has graced many zines, including her own beautiful zine, AMAZING GRACE.

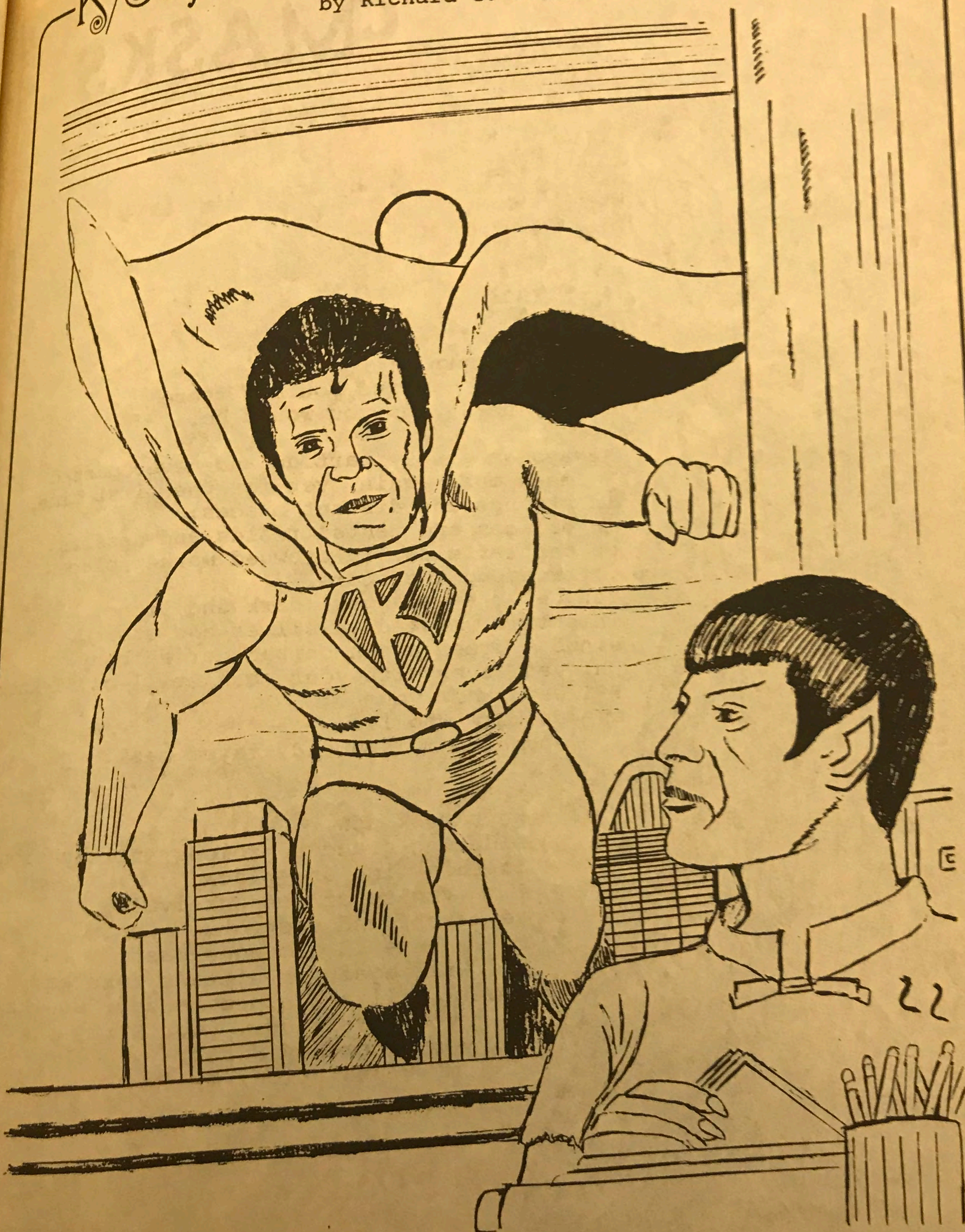
A fan of Star Trek ever since the "before time", Betsy Fisher, a Pennsylvanian, found very early that the basic concepts of love and tolerance stressed on the show were very much her cup-of-tea. A long time member of the Al Anon Program, she found that many of the ideas she learned to apply to her life through A.A. and Al Anon, were subtly picked up and repeated throughout the gentle premise of the show. The idea of her poem, "Lovers" came during a dream, and when she awoke in the morning, she found its basic lines scrawled on a scratch pad beside her bed. Betsy admits that, at times, some of her "normal" ideas are even weirder than this!!

T'Hera Snaider's birthplace was Vienna, Austria, which she and her parents left in 1939, when she was nine years old, because of the advent of Hitler--"And then the fun began"! Although their destination was Shanghai, they decided to stay in Manila, since it would have been easier to emigrate to America from the Phillipines. Just when their quota number for emigration to the U.S. was coming up--Pearl Harbor! They were stuck in Manila all during the Japanese Occupation. Eventually, they reached America, where T'Hera met her husband in her father's photo studio in San Francisco. They are both retired now, and like to move around the country, and live either in Tennessee or the Texas Hill country. She does beautiful paintings of the ENTERPRISE, Vulcan landscapes, and other Star Trek subjects which she sells at conventions. Her poetry has been very well received, though she never finished the second grade of formal schooling. T'Hera says, "I read everything in sight and everything I know comes from reading."



K/S: A Different Perspective

by Richard G. Pollet



"I've heard of alternate universes, but this is super illogical!"

MASKS

by John Eliot Lowell

I turn...

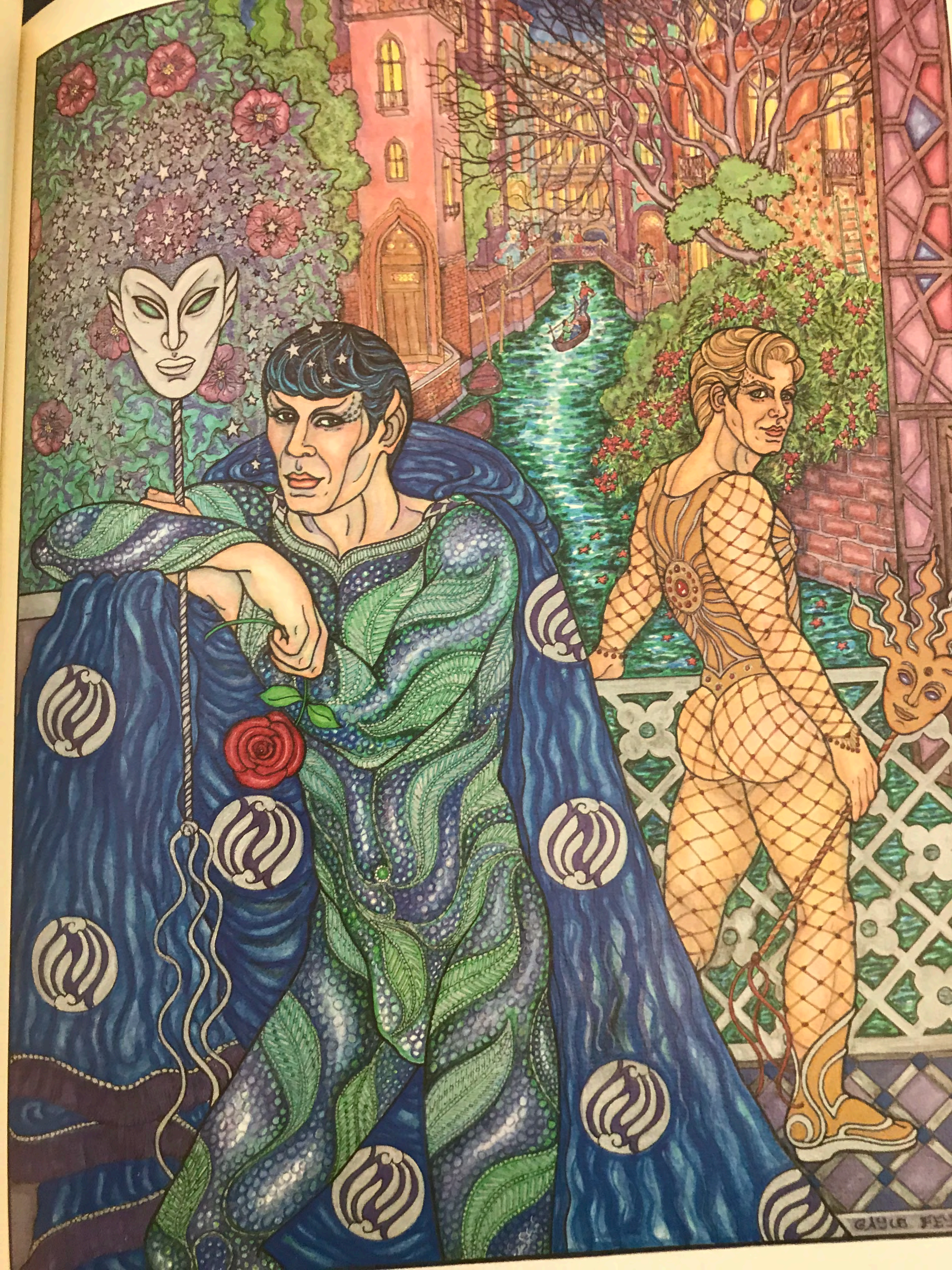
...and you are there
as I knew you would be.

Always and ever, parting and never parted
We meet once again, yet for the first time,
In strange and distant places:
in palaces and tents, fields and deserts,
on battlefields, in crowded market places,
...or among the stars.

You, ever a stranger, dark and lithe,
This time, masked in silver and stars,
sinuous green cloth on pantherish body.
Oh, yes, even with your mask still on, I know!
I always know you
as you know who I am
beneath my sungold, rayed mask.

We unmask now,
sidelong glances prolong anticipation.
In this time and place,

Venice of the Carnivals,
we have found each other again
as we have in dim ages past
and will again in distant futures,
when I will again become your Soulka,
your Alexander, your Kirk,
and you become my Surak,
my Hephaestion, my Spock.





Midnight In Venice

by Jenny Starr

"Where are we?"

"Unknown."

"What is all this?"

"Unknown."

"What happened to the rest of the landing party?"

"Also unknown."

"Well, speculate!"

"Captain, you have mentioned frequently in the past your distaste for debating in a vacuum. I have similar distaste for speculating in a vacuum."

"I know, Spock, I know. Speculate anyway."

"Let us review what few facts we have at our disposal. We beamed down to a planet about which we knew very little. We had determined its mass, the fact that it has a breathable atmosphere, that it...."

"I know all that. Tell me something I don't know."

"You know as much as I do. One moment the six members of the landing party were standing on an apparently barren planet with no discernible signs of life registering on our tricorders..."

"...and the next minute you and I are standing alone in the middle of...all this."

"Correct."

"I could use something a little more substantial than that, Science Officer."

"Sir, I regret that I am unable to...."

"HEY, YOU!"

"What are you doing?"

"Did you see that? I yelled down at that guy going by in that little boat...."

"I believe it is called a gondola."

"...and he went right past. Just like he couldn't see or hear us. Maybe if I yelled again."

"Captain, I assure you, your shout was sufficiently strident to be heard by any being within a very large vicinity."

"Sorry, Spock. I keep forgetting how sensitive those ears are to loud noises."

"Especially when the loud noise occurs a mere decimeter away."

"All right, all right. Next order of the day: let's get out of here."

"A splendid idea, if possible. However...."

"OUCH!"

"Jim, are you all right?"

"There's a damned force field here!"

"Indeed, I had detected it just prior to your attempt to walk through it."

"You might have told me!"

"That was my intention. However, you do have a tendency to interrupt before I have completed an explanation of...."

"Okay, so we're trapped. What the Hell are these things?"

"Ah, yes. These are most fascinating, Captain. They appear to be some form of mask."

"Masks?"

"Yes. Used only in certain types of dramatic presentations now, in ancient times they frequently played a distinctive role in assorted forms of social amusement in various Terran cultures."

"Such as?"

"In ancient Greek drama, they were used to identify stock characters--characters representing comic or tragic aspects of a play, for instance. They were used similarly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the presentation of masques in Europe."

"More masks?"

"Masques were short allegorical dramatic performances staged by actors wearing masks."

"This is all starting to get a little confusing."

"Masks, together with various costumes, also were used throughout Earth's history by participants in public forms of entertainment,

such as street carnivals, and in private amusements known as masquerade balls."

"Uh huh."

"One of the more interesting rituals involved in such forms of amusement was that of the unmasking."

"Unmasking?"

"Yes. When an ancient form of chronometer known as a clock struck the hour of midnight, the revelers would remove their masks, thus revealing their true identities to each other."

"Sounds like it could be fun."

"Often the masks were quite grotesque, for the purpose of exaggerating certain aspects of human character or behavior."

"Well, these are hardly grotesque."

"Indeed. In point of fact, they are quite beautiful and very well crafted."

"Uh, Spock...they also look a little familiar, don't you think?"

"I had noticed, Captain. Highly stylized, of course, but this one obviously is intended to represent a Vulcan, while the one which you hold..."

"...is a very idealized version of a Human with blond hair and a charming smile."

"Hmmmmmm. Perhaps....Captain, have you noticed the clothing in which we are attired?"

"Uh, yeah. I've been trying hard not to notice it, but it's a little hard to ignore."

"Yes, I too find it most...revealing."

"Well, what the Hell is this anyway? Somebody's idea of a joke? I feel a little ridiculous. This thing I'm wearing--or barely wearing, I should say--looks like a Wrigley brothel's version of chain mail! And that one you've got on is...is...well, actually, it's pretty intriguing. I never realized your body was so...."

"Captain, I hardly find 'intriguing' the fact that we obviously have been staged as an exhibition for some unseen aliens' amusement."

"What? I don't follow you."

"Do you not? We are, as you appropriately phrased it, 'trapped' by a force field on a balcony in what appears to be a representation of the city of Venice, Italy, on ancient Earth. In addition...."

"Well, it would seem your speculating in a vacuum has come up with some conclusions, anyway."

"I recognize the scene from old pictorials of the city as it appeared

before it was inundated with water and crumbled away by time and decay."

"I see. Go on."

"In addition, we have been costumed in a most...unsettling...fashion and given masks representative of our own faces."

"And?"

"Obviously, we are expected to participate in or provide some sort of entertainment for our captors."

"Such as?"

"That, Captain, is entirely open to speculation."

"Agreed. Well, I don't see any alternative to waiting patiently for whatever happens next."

"A logical decision, sir, since we are unable to go anywhere."

"In the meantime, we may as well relax and enjoy the view. It is beautiful."

"Indeed."

"I mean it, though, Spock. Your uniform's been covering up a pretty magnificent-looking body there. I confess I'm envious."

"Envious, Captain? I see no reason for envy on your part. Your own anatomy is most...interesting."

"Yeah, I've always wanted to have a body like that. Long and lean and... What do you mean by 'interesting'?"

"I have overheard a significant number of comments in the past from assorted female crewmembers concerning your...curvilinear structure."

"Come again?"

"Said crewmembers seemed most attracted to your...curves."

"Curves?!"

"Indeed. A number of male crewmembers, as well, have been observed watching in admiration as you precede them down a corridor. You would seem to be one of those rare individuals who possess the charisma to attract both...."

"Spock, are you implying...."

"Captain, I am implying nothing. I am only doing what you yourself ordered."

"Which was?"

"Speculating."

"Right. I think it's time to change the subject."

"As you wish."

"You know, seeing you out of uniform like this makes me realize just how much more there is to you than meets the eye?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, I mean, I've always been able to read you to a certain degree...probably more than most people."

"Indeed?"

"Yeah. I've seen hints of the sense of humor, your gentleness, your capacity for caring. But...I don't know. Somehow, right now, when you're relaxed like this, with your mind off your duties...well, I feel like I'm able to get underneath that cool Vulcan exterior and see the real you."

"Captain, I am a Vulcan--both on the exterior and the interior."

"No, you're not, my friend. You may be Vulcan on the exterior, but on the interior you're simply...Spock."

"Perhaps the same may be said of you."

"Huh? I don't have any exterior covering up the real me."

"Do you not? On the ship you are both my Captain and my friend. When we are off duty, playing chess or similarly engaged, you are capable of relaxing your command image somewhat. However, you are never entirely free of it. Your mind is concerned with duty and your responsibility to your crewmen at all times. This aspect of your character is, of course, part of what makes you an exceptional commander. Your godly image is a great advantage to...."

"My what?"

"Surely you are aware that to your crew you are a form of god."

"God?!"

"God: a being or object believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to...."

"I'm well aware of what a god is, Spock. But I'm a far cry from being one."

"Technically, perhaps. However to the members of a devoted crew who have seen you survive against excessive odds, who have watched you save your ship, and them, in countless desperate situations, who have...."

"Spock, you're embarrassing me!"

"Precisely. This modesty is a characteristic which you do not allow others to see. However, in such conditions as this one, I am able to see such facets of your personality which are not otherwise apparent. I, too, am able to see the 'real you'."

"Spock, you know what?"

"What, Captain?"

"We ought to spend more time simply being our 'real' selves around each other."

"I am agreeable to that suggestion, Captain."

"You can start by calling me Jim a little more often. Do you realize you only call me Jim when your Vulcan exterior isn't looking?"

"I was not aware of that phenomenon. Are you quite sure?"

"Trust me."

"I do."

"Spock?"

"Yes, Jim?"

"Did you really mean it...what you said about my...anatomy...being interesting?"

"Indeed. I would go so far as to say fascinating."

"Really?"

"Beautiful anatomy is not reserved for those of the feminine gender, Jim."

"I quite agree. And the capacity for loving is not reserved for those of the human race, Spock."

"I find I must agree."

"Spock...."

"Jim! I believe that the force field is dissolving."

"Really?"

"Yes. As you can see, the original topography of the planet is reasserting itself. I do believe that we are free to return to the ship."

"But I don't understand. What was the purpose of all this? Nothing happened!"

"Indeed? Except, perhaps, that the clock finally struck midnight."

"Huh?"

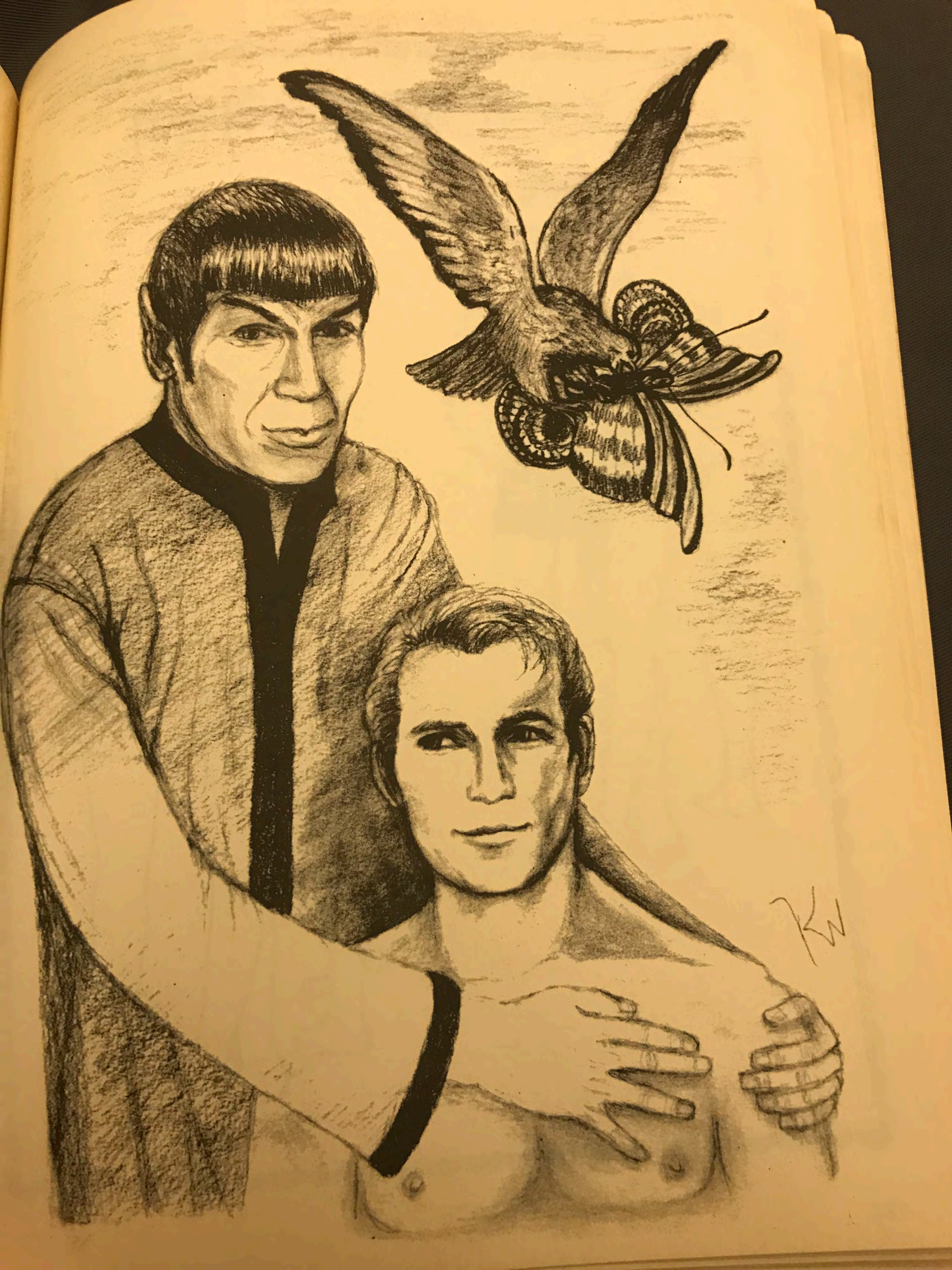
The Contributors

Juane Michaud, the artist whose work graces RING OF SOSHERN, lives in Toronto, Canada, where she works as an art director for a large retail advertising agency. She also does freelance illustrating, cartooning, and film animation. Besides Star Trek, she also loves science fiction, classic horror and old comedy films, theater, and folk music. She is an animal lover and nature enthusiast, and enjoys swimming, horseback riding—and creative writing.

Irene Schechter was born in Paris, France, now lives in New York State, and has been a Star Trek fan since 1966. Before she became an American citizen, her daughter and son wanted to know why she did not have pointy ears like Mr. Spock, since she was an "alien"! She has a B.A. in painting from Hunter College, and has studied drawing at the Art Students League in New York. She has worked as a translator, commercial artist, and is currently doing freelance illustrations.

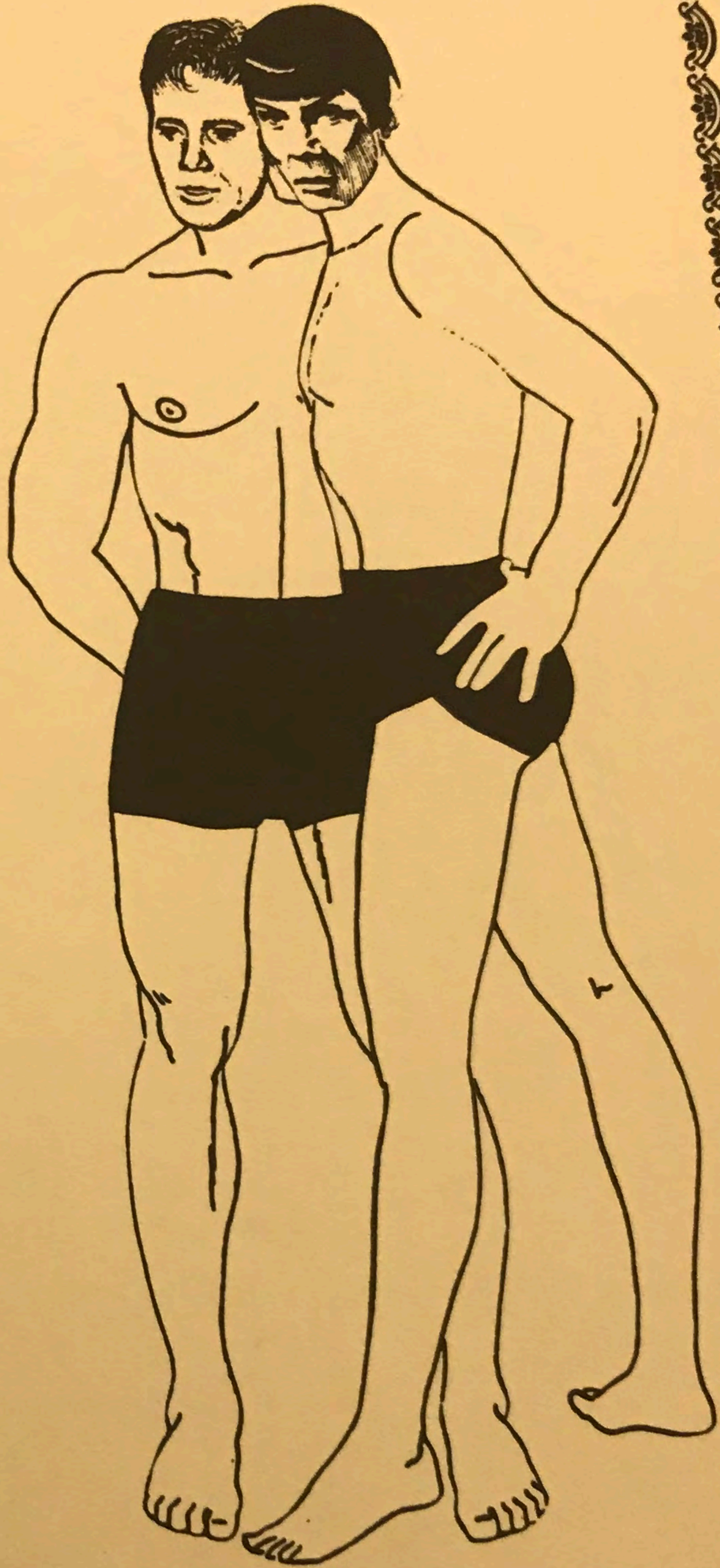
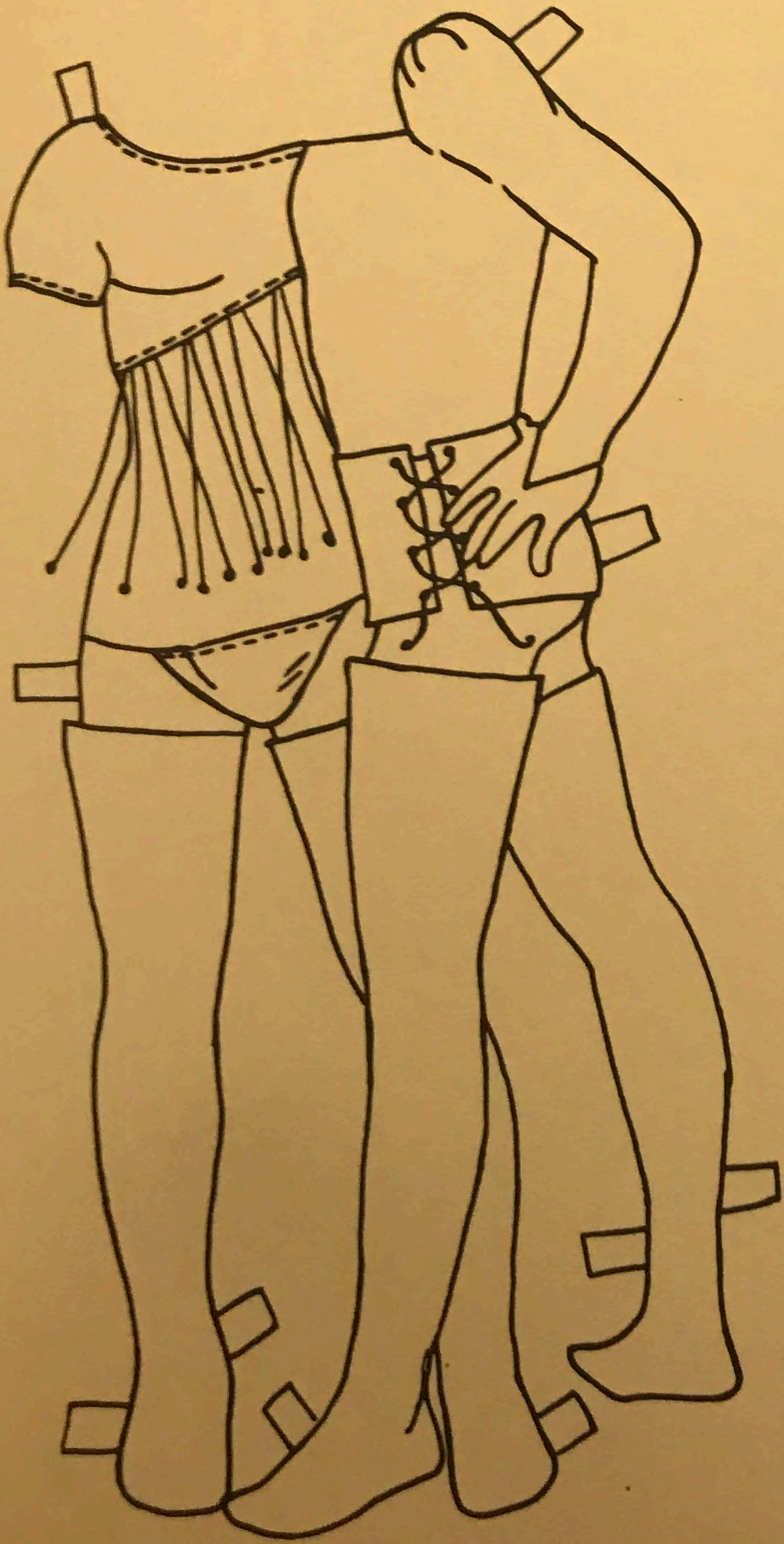
Dorothy Schenk is a native of Long Island and a graduate of New York State University with a degree in Commercial Art. She has done much freelance work, and does commissions, including Star Trek art. She especially likes to work with portraits. Also a needlepoint designer, she had done a few Star Trek motifs. She is an organist and harpist, working for the chapels at an AFB. Her regular job is in a high school library. She lives with her cats, Morris and Jacob, in Fairfield, California.

Jacqueline Zoost is a "first generation" ST fan, having seen the first broadcast on TV twenty years ago. She's been hooked on it ever since. She lives in Westford, Massachusetts, is 43 years old and single, and has been drawing since she was a child, although never professionally. She only started submitting artwork to zines since late 1985.

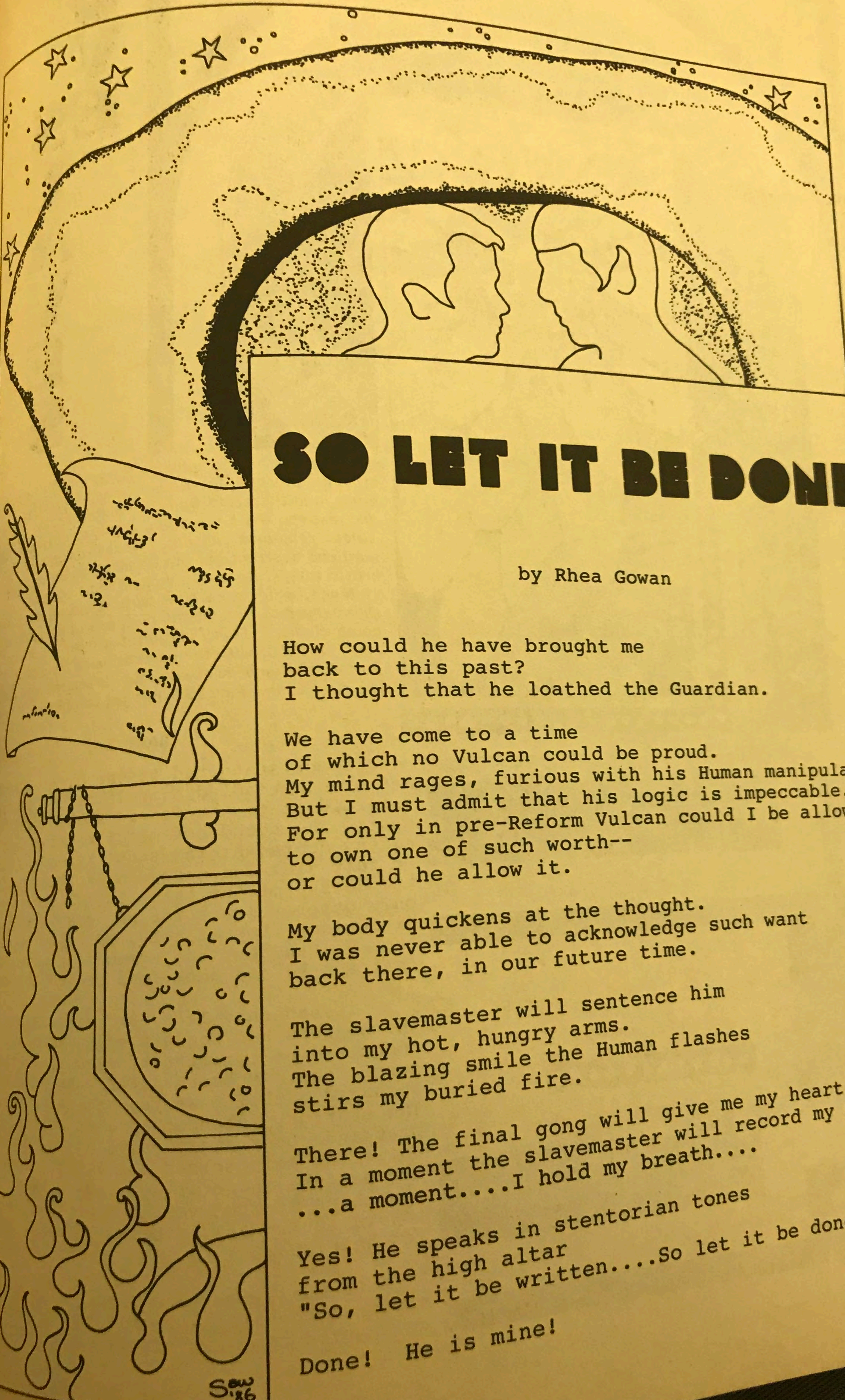


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by
Kayleen
Sybrandt







SO LET IT BE DONE

by Rhea Gowan

How could he have brought me
back to this past?
I thought that he loathed the Guardian.

We have come to a time
of which no Vulcan could be proud.
My mind rages, furious with his Human manipulation.
But I must admit that his logic is impeccable.
For only in pre-Reform Vulcan could I be allowed
to own one of such worth--
or could he allow it.

My body quickens at the thought.
I was never able to acknowledge such want
back there, in our future time.

The slavemaster will sentence him
into my hot, hungry arms.
The blazing smile the Human flashes
stirs my buried fire.

There! The final gong will give me my heart.
In a moment the slavemaster will record my purchase
...a moment....I hold my breath....

Yes! He speaks in stentorian tones
from the high altar
"So, let it be written....So let it be done!"

Done! He is mine!

LOVESLAVES



This is an alternate universe story, set in a strange timeline in which the Romulans had warp drive early, and therefore won the Earth-Romulan wars, and overran the Federation, nearly destroying Earth. Vulcan remained concealed, secluded from the turmoil and destruction. An intensely passionate and erotic tale, it does also include some necessary violence, which does have purpose and meaning, and thus serves to further the plot, as will gradually become clear.... Part I is reprinted from the British zine, DUET 3, with the permission of the author. Part II, the long-awaited sequel is printed here for the first time. Part III is not yet completed.

PART I

Spock staggered to the bank of instruments and steadied himself as the lonely asteroid station tried to shake itself to dust. The sounds of metal tearing and safety doors whining shut filled his ears. He felt sick and disoriented from sensing the deaths of the three scientists, the only other Vulcans for parsecs in any direction. Desperately, he tried to contact Vulcan, but the communications console spat sparks and smoke and ceased to function.

It had only been 18.5 minutes ago when the sensors had registered an anomaly. Spock had no opportunity even to become suspicious. Moments later, the pirate ships appeared out of nowhere, attacking viciously. The station, intended as a scientific outpost and observatory only, had no defense. While the main screen still functioned, he watched the ships attack. Soon, most of the ships started veering off inward, toward 40 Eridani. Toward Vulcan. And he was helpless.

Gradually becoming aware of his own physical condition, he blocked the pain of an injured arm, and slowly walked to the

by Dale Campion

life support indicators. Yes; life support was failing, the equipment damaged beyond repair. The emergency lights already were fading. Spock located a log recorder, and set about carefully recording his observations in the time remaining to him. Coolly, he reported all the details of the situation that he had been able to observe, including a detailed description of the ships: a motley group of ships, Romulans, with their bird-of-prey markings obliterated, and other, strange markings substituted; and other ships, some completely strange, others oddly familiar...like a picture he had once seen on a tape, somewhere. Finally, he put the recorder aside, and waited for death calmly. It was very quiet in the ruined station: a lonely place to die, as lonely as he had lived.

A banging on the safety door brought him out of his stupor and, at the glow of an energy weapon cutting through the metal, he jumped to his feet. He had no weapon, anyway resistance was illogical, so he merely waited as the door gave way and fell inward. He did not even wince or try to escape, although he had thought that the air in the room might all rush out into space once the door was breached.

Three humanoid figures stepped out of the darkness, through the door, toward Spock. All three wore breathing masks which obscured their faces. Two of them held energy weapons pointed at Spock, as the central figure swaggered forward, and pulled off his mask. Spock gasped in shock. "He is of my mother's race," he thought, "From Earth, the planet we thought destroyed!"

The Human advanced on Spock, holding a rod-like device with a moving light near one end. Spock, thinking it was a weapon, involuntarily stepped back, but the pirate spoke, "Take this breathing mask, Romulan!" The device was a translator, Spock realized, and he spoke slowly in Vulcan, "I am Spock. I am not Romulan. Who are you and why did you destroy this station?" as he reached for the mask and put it on. He was given no reply, as the other two pirates grasped his arms on either side, and pulled him into the next room at an order from the Earthman. He turned to face Spock proudly, head tilted upward, with a characteristic smile which Spock would come to know well indeed: "I am Captain James T. Kirk of the privateership VENGEANCE. You are now my captive and my plunder. You will come with me to answer questions, and you will cause no trouble. I may let you live... for awhile." Kirk spoke into a small device then, and an odd sensation caught at Spock, a feeling of nonexistence only for a few seconds, then he found himself in the pirate's ship.

Kirk strutted off the platform, followed by the pirate guards with Spock. He observed the gray walls, the unfamiliar instruments, well-worn from rough usage and obviously repaired many times, and the crewmen, all Earthmen, dressed in an odd assortment of styles, even including bits

of what Spock recognized to be Romulan uniforms. Turning to a crewman, Kirk said, "Mr. Scott, I'll need all the speed you can give me now. We have to catch up to the rest of the fleet." Without waiting for an answer, he turned abruptly to face Spock with a brilliant smile that was almost a sneer. "Romulan! You will be taken to sickbay now. Your arm will be bandaged. Make no trouble! The guards will be eager to demonstrate their phasers on you."

"Captain Kirk, I am no Romulan. I am Spock, a Vulcan. I intend you no harm. Why are you holding me prisoner?"

"So! You can understand English! Good. You and I will talk later." He left then, walking rapidly down the cramped corridor, and the guards pushed Spock in the opposite direction.

They were met in sickbay by three Humans. One stepped forward to stare disapprovingly at Spock. "I'm McCoy. Doctor. Now, strip!"

Spock made no move to comply, and was swiftly seized by two orderlies. He shook them off with ease, but one guard took aim and fired his phaser. Through a green-tinged haze, and a painful tingling, he saw the orderlies approaching again. They supported him as McCoy, brandishing a knife, drew near. He could not resist. His clothes were efficiently cut and pulled off, then he was thrown onto a table connected to various instrumentation. The orderlies strapped him down tightly.

"Easy! Easy!" McCoy yelled. "He may be Romulan, but he's injured, and he can't die until the Captain has talked to him." He fussed about, checking the straps and the diagnostic equipment. Reaching for a can of plastiskin, he turned to the men in the room. "All right, get out now. The isolation room is small enough without you and your guns hanging around."

Spock watched as the men left, under McCoy's stare. Then, with surprisingly gentle fingers, he cleaned and spray-banded Spock's wounded arm, as Spock faded in and out of consciousness, then quickly hypoed something in his other arm, before he could think of protesting. Although it made him feel queasy, he did become fully conscious. When McCoy finished checking the readouts on Spock, he stared down at him speculatively. "The Captain usually gets what he wants. You'd be better off if you cooperated with him fully."

Kirk entered as McCoy was working on his report. "Jim, he's not a Romulan. Oh, there are some similarities, but there are some Human analogs, too...and something else that I can't identify."

"Well, maybe he was telling the truth, then. I think I want to talk to him alone, Bones. Activate the instruments, please."

As McCoy stalked out disapprovingly, Kirk advanced to stand next to the table,

raking Spock with gold-flamed green eyes. The warm, wine-red velvet of Kirk's tunic brushed his leg, and a hand trailed down his uninjured arm. Spock controlled a shudder with difficulty. He was very conscious of his nakedness. "Spock." As the unwilling eyes met his again, Kirk continued, "You are connected to a very efficient lie detector. You say you are Vulcan. Don't try lying; the instruments will prove you wrong."

"I am...from Vulcan."

Kirk frowned at the answer. It sounded like an evasion, but the instruments registered no change. "What were you doing on that asteroid?"

"I coordinated scientific observation, and the necessary maintenance of the station."

"Where is Vulcan? Is this the Vulcan system? ...Answer me!" Kirk suddenly reached out and slapped Spock's face hard twice. He frowned when the machine registered almost no discernible reaction.

"I...am not allowed to give information on Vulcan."

"You will speak, one way or the other, you will speak!" Kirk seemed to blaze in his anger. The soft sickbay lights glinted off his pale gold skin like fire.

"That is illogical. I do not choose to speak."

Kirk stared at him for a moment, then rose and walked around the table. "Illogical!" he said, and started chuckling. He leaned over the table, a combination of annoyance and amusement on his face. Spock tried to control his apprehension and consternation as Kirk's hands moved up his arms to his shoulders, gripping there for a moment, then moved up his neck, to rest finally on either side of his face gently. "Spock," Kirk coaxed softly, "our fleet is now heading toward the primary stars of this system. We already know that the third planet is inhabited by an advanced civilization. Believe me. They, and you, will be better off if you tell me everything." Looking deeply into Spock's eyes for another moment, he continued, "If I can convince the Fleet Captain that your people are not Romulan, and are harmless, perhaps he will not order us to attack." Kirk's hands left Spock's face, sliding down his chest. "You can save your people, Spock!"

"And if I did agree to tell you what you want to know, afterwards would you let me go--take me to the third planet?"

"No," Kirk said softly, "we couldn't risk it."

"Then, whether I spoke or not, you would...dispose of me?"

Kirk smiled, sitting down on the edge of the table again. "Oh, no! We are pirates, you know! We take anything we

can get of value, to sell wherever we can. You'd be worth a considerable amount of dilithium crystals in the slave markets on Rigel IV. Male Orions are very fond of attractive Romulan slaves." Kirk chuckled evilly. "Yes, we've sold a good many Romulans there. The Orions mind-block them so that they aren't capable of physical resistance, but they are quite aware of everything that is happening to them." Kirk watched Spock carefully for reaction. "They are used sexually, and the Orions are said to have some...pretty extreme tastes. Sometimes they are castrated, too, but by then I suppose it doesn't matter to them anymore."

Spock's eyes closed for a bare moment. When they opened, his face was still quite expressionless. He stared into Kirk's eyes without speaking. Without another word, Kirk rose and walked out the door toward the bridge.

After Kirk left, Spock found himself quite alone, and seized the opportunity to test the straps holding him to the table, but it was useless. As he lay struggling with exhaustion and renewed nausea, he heard derisive laughter. Two Humans stood at the door. "Well, look at the Romulan, Joe! D'you suppose he'd like us to help him get off that cold uncomfortable table?" The bulky, villainous Human laughed again, a filthy bray. He pulled out a knife, seemingly from thin air, and advanced on Spock. The other Human followed, with a sadistic smile of high amusement. They moved to stand behind Spock's head, where he could not see what they were doing.

"Well, Joe, he sure's Hell got sickening green skin. And green blood maybe--we can sure find out anyways. Maybe we can rearrange his features a little, cut up those ears, do him a real favor by making him more Human, eh, Joe?" He grasped Spock's hair and twisted, running the point of the knife down the side of his face and neck. "Yeah, and that green...thing... down there would look fine tacked up on your bulkhead as a trophy!" Joe leared as the knife began to move in earnest. At that point, Spock began to retreat into himself.

McCoy burst through the door. "All right, you two! Drop the knife and get out of here. I'm putting you on report."

"We were just having a little fun. He's only a Romulan!"

"He's the Captain's responsibility, and I hope he throws you in the brig!"

After they left, McCoy angrily began tending the cut on Spock's face. He touched a control on the side of the table, and it folded part way, drawing Spock into a sitting position. McCoy found a blanket in a nearby storage cabinet, and spread it over Spock, fastening it loosely to the side of the table. "Are you thirsty? Hungry?"

"I would like some water."

"You should eat something too while you have the chance."

"Very well, but I will not eat animal flesh. I...thank you, Doctor."

McCoy left the room, only to return a moment later with a tray of fruit, some vegetables, and a pitcher of water, which he put on a stand near the table. Eyeing Spock with a mixture of sympathy, dislike, and wariness, he said, "This should be safe enough for you to eat. I will have to free one of your arms. Do I have to call the guards in here?"

"No, Doctor. I will cause no trouble."

After making Spock as comfortable as possible, McCoy sat some distance away, and watched Spock covertly as he sampled the fruit. When he finished eating, McCoy drew his chair closer, and asked, "How is it you speak our language? Do you also know who we are and where we come from?"

"Vulcans have known of the existence of the Sol System for some years, but we had thought Earth destroyed by the Romulans." Spock wondered how much information it was safe to give this strangely sympathetic, if brusque, Human.

"Well, we very nearly were destroyed. But we are tough. We fought them to a standstill, though they did manage to destroy our friend, the Centaureans. Now, we're determined to drive them out of space wherever we find them, and destroy their military strength and economy so thoroughly they'll never rise out of the muck to bother us again."

Spock noted the bitter tone in McCoy's voice. "You do not approve?"

"I wish it could be otherwise. Life is precious." McCoy paced to a cabinet nearby, and withdrew a precious bottle of Saurian brandy, traded by the Rigellians for a Romulan life. After filling a glass and drinking it down rapidly, he continued, his back toward Spock, "They changed us, you know. In all the decades of war with them, we were changed. Socially and morally. Now, we deal in stolen goods and humanoid lives. Slavery! And we're sanctioned by Earth, the Sol System government. Encouraged!... No, I don't approve! The Romulans may not have destroyed us physically, but they have destroyed us nonetheless."

"You have been forced to change," Spock said softly, "but you can change again. Return to what you were...or better."

"I doubt it. Once our system was rich in resources; now they are gone, used up or destroyed. So, we steal what we can in order to survive, and destroy the rest. Soon, we'll be no better than our enemies are." McCoy turned abruptly, and walked back to Spock's side. "And now, for your own good, you'd better tell me about those Human elements in your blood. They'll expect me to patch you up if you're...injured during questioning. I need to know what drugs,

what techniques, are safe to use on you, and on your people."

"Well?" McCoy said impatiently, "Are all your people like you?"

"No. I am unique."

"Can't you do better than that?" Your readings suggest that there is Earth Human stock in your ancestry."

"Yes. My mother was from Earth, one of several survivors of a ship damaged by Romulans, which crash-landed on...a planet near Vulcan. However, my physical makeup and...mental characteristics are mostly Vulcan--similar to Romulan in a few ways, but different in others..." Spock paused, quite certain now that he had said too much.

"And what happened to your mother then, Spock, after your father was through with her?" McCoy asked curiously.

Spock stiffened. "My father and mother were honorably bonded according to Vulcan custom. She lives on Vulcan, in my Father's house, and is quite well."

About to ask the meaning of "bonded", McCoy was interrupted by a flashing light, indicating red alert, probably meaning they were about to attack again. McCoy started to leave, then backtracked, and refastened Spock's free arm. He then placed a small remote control device in Spock's hand. "If anyone bothers you, or if you need help, press this button, and I'll come running." Pocketing a twin device, McCoy ran out the door, locking it behind him. Spock, cold and uncomfortable, was left alone with his thoughts. A lifetime on Vulcan had ill prepared him to deal with these Humans; his mother seemed to have very little in common with them. Logic failed to offer a solution to his predicament, or a way to save his people from probable destruction.

After checking that Sickbay was prepared for casualties, McCoy headed for the bridge. He arrived in a crowded room to find all eyes fixed on the main view-screen, where three of the fleet's ships were firing phasers directly at the orange-red planet beneath them. The energy beams were being deflected aside by a powerful force field surrounding the planet. But as he watched, the beams were all coordinated to focus on one point, and they began to penetrate the field.

Many of the crew breathed sighs of relief and anticipation, but Kirk frowned thoughtfully. "So. It is possible to conquer Vulcan," and contacted the Fleet Captain, Pike. "Sir, I'd like to recommend that, since the element of surprise has already been lost, and since my prisoner has said that there is nothing of value here anyway, we leave now and head for Rigel IV, and sell what we already have. There is certainly no more room in our holds for more slaves."

The suspicious voice of the Fleet Captain answered, "Are you sure he was telling the truth about no valuables, Kirk?"

Kirk met McCoy's eyes cautioningly. "Yes, sir, quite sure." McCoy's eyebrows rose sharply, but he acceded to Kirk's unspoken request, and did not challenge his statement.

After Kirk closed communications, and ordered the course changed to Rigel, he turned to McCoy. "I'm curious about this Vulcan, Bones. He intrigues me, and I do want to question him further, but I don't think we'll get much out of him by the usual methods." He continued very softly, so that the bridge crew would not overhear, "Make him as comfortable as possible. I'll be down later."

"And once you've gotten what information you want from him, we sell him on Rigel IV, right?" McCoy said, wondering why he felt angry.

"Shhh! Quiet! No...not if I have anything to say about it. Find out everything you can about Vulcans: society, customs...even morality. I'll see you later, in your office."

McCoy left the bridge and returned to his in Sickbay, wondering cynically what Kirk was playing at now.

Kirk mused on the subject of Spock as he rapidly, impatiently, concluded his business on the bridge. The alien was strangely...compelling, he admitted to himself. There was an aura of stringently controlled power about him, an intensity almost passionate. And yet, he seemed so innocent, so untouched. Kirk wondered if his impressions of Spock could possibly be correct; he was eager to test them. He remembered the sensation of stroking the alien's suede-like skin. "No!" he thought, "Rigel won't get this one. I want him!"

After summoning Scotty, his reluctant First Officer, to take over the conn, he went to the sickbay office. "Well? What did you find out?" he asked impatiently. McCoy located another bottle of Saurian brandy in a supply cabinet, and filled two glasses.

"Little enough. He's pretty close mouthed. He did say that Vulcan culture has little in common with Romulan, although both peoples probably had a common ancestry. He claims that Vulcans left their barbarous ancestry centuries ago, to form a society based on logic...which brought peace and contentment to all," McCoy finished sarcastically. "Seems unlikely...or inHuman. at any rate."

"Yes, yes! Go on...what else? Psychology? Morality?"

McCoy poured a second round of brandy. "Look: I really don't understand him. I can only draw a few tentative conclusions: he's honest, almost incapable of lying I'd guess, probably typically of his culture. Very

honorable. He'd die before betraying Vulcan-- I'm betting a year's pay on that." McCoy abruptly pulled his chair up to face Kirk challengingly. "Just what do you want from him anyway? And why did you lie to Pike about having questioned Spock? If he ever finds out, he'll nail both our hides to a bulkhead!"

"But I did question him, Bones." Kirk grinned and shook his head, "Don't worry about it. Pike's up for promotion to a desk when we return to Earth, and I intend to be the next Fleet Captain. And don't worry about Spock; he's my responsibility. The Orions won't get this one. I'm going to keep him. I won't be the only Captain in the fleet to have a personal... servant, you know. Since there's not enough manpower left in the fleets for a yeoman...."

McCoy interrupted, shocked, "You don't mean it, Jim! You wouldn't take a...slave... like some of those Human degenerates?!"

"I told you: I want him! Don't try to interfere, doctor." Kirk added placatingly, "Would you rather he be a mutilated plaything for some wealthy Orion? Or pushed out of the VENGEANCE into space without a suit?" He filled his glass and McCoy's to the top again. "You know we can't return him to Vulcan. Why are you so concerned about the fate of one Romulanoid, anyway?"

"Well, he is half Human, as I told you in my first report," McCoy muttered defensively. "But Jim, you just can't let him roam freely on the ship! Both of you would breathe space if Pike found out. Spock would probably feel duty-bound to escape. And what makes you think he'd be a willing slave? You can't dominate him physically! Surely you wouldn't stoop to mind-blocking him like those Orion bastards?!"

Kirk chuckled lightly, and said soothingly, "Bones, Bones! Don't worry about it; I'll take care of everything. There'll be no problem. And I'll take all the responsibility if anything should go wrong."

"It's you I'm concerned about," McCoy said gruffly.

Kirk rose, and stepping to McCoy's side, affectionately squeezed his shoulder. "I know, Bones. I'll go talk to Spock now. If Vulcans are such logical creatures, he'll agree to what I have to offer him. He'll see it's for the best. Everything will work out fine." He could see that McCoy was not convinced, and still uncertain about his motives--but then, Kirk himself felt the same way.

Spock, now strapped to a sickbay bed, reluctantly roused himself from a light meditation trance, and slowly opened his eyes to meet Kirk's unsettling wide-eyed gaze. Reflexively, he pulled his defenses around him; while he could handle verbal fencing with McCoy, this alien put him

off balance. Kirk was an uncomfortable enigma to him.

He partly repressed a shudder as Kirk gently turned his head to one side, to examine the cut made by the brutal crewmen. "I'm glad McCoy caught those two in time, before they really hurt you. I threw them in the brig, and they will be put off the ship at our next port, and ejected from the Fleet. I won't have men on my ship who disobey my commands!" Spock felt Kirk's hands shake slightly as he moved them down Spock's cheeks in a brief caress, before withdrawing them.

"Spock," Kirk said in an intense, vibrant voice, "The Fleet attacked what I believe is your home, Vulcan." His hands moved to Spock's shoulder. "Its defenses were penetrated." For the first time, Kirk was rewarded by a noticeable reaction.

"No! It cannot be!" Spock abruptly surged against the straps which held him firmly to the bed. He fought to control himself again.

"Don't worry. I convinced the Fleet Captain that we had no more room for loot; that we should sell what we have on Rigel IV first, before risking an attack. And I told him that, when I questioned you, you told me that Vulcan was a poor, barren planetoid of no value to us. I convinced him, Spock. Your planet is safe for now."

Spock stared at him, uncomprehendingly.

"After we leave the trading planet, he'll want to return, to raid Vulcan and capture your people to be sold as slaves..." Kirk paused for a reaction from Spock.

"Why are you telling me this?" Spock said expressionlessly; he was determined not to be goaded into another emotional display.

Kirk smiled dazzlingly at him, "...but Fleet Captain Pike will not be able to return, because he has been recalled to Earth to be promoted. His successor will be responsible for taking any action against Vulcan which he thinks is profitable. And I intend to be that successor."

"So, now we are on our way to Rigel IV, where we will sell our loot and slaves, then on to Earth." Spock's narrow brown eyes bored into him, trying to hide the hopelessness he felt. Vulcan had escaped devastation by the Romulans only to fall prey to these Earth-born le-matyas. It was likely, he knew, that all Vulcan would be destroyed in the attempt to enslave it.

"Spock, you can save your people from destruction, and save yourself from becoming the mutilated, mindless plaything of some Orion sadist. If you cooperate with me, I'll make sure the Fleet doesn't return...and you won't be sold in the Rigel IV slave markets."

Spock tried convulsively, uselessly, to shake off Kirk's hands grasping his shoulders hard, and said in a voice colder than Pluto, "What is it you want from me?"

"Only your willing cooperation. You will do as I ask you, and you will not attempt to escape this ship. In return, I can promise you that I'll never raid Vulcan; I'll protect it! I'll never sell you. You'll be well treated here, I give my word. But if you should ever try to escape, our bargain is off."

Kirk searched Spock's face avidly. "Will you agree? You must tell me your decision now! The computer banks must be adjusted to ensure Vulcan's safety. Understand: I am putting myself into considerable danger for your sake. The only way I can save you from the slave markets, is to claim you as my share of the loot, and the only way I can justify your existence on the VENGEANCE, is to make you my personal...servant. I cannot possibly release you or allow you to escape. If I did, we'd both be executed. I'll have to trust you with my life."

"I am no man's slave."

Kirk rose abruptly, angrily, "Then you will be some Orion's slave!" And he stalked out of the room.

Spock was left to reconsider his words, and ponder his lack of choices. Meanwhile, Kirk moved fast toward the gym, where he worked out vigorously, until exhaustion dissipated his anger. By the time Spock was ready to reconsider Kirk's offer, the Captain had showered and changed, and was on his way back to see Spock again.

Kirk stood proudly, implacably, looking down at Spock. "No. I am not going to make my offer to you again. but you will be my slave, not some damned Orion's! I'll have you, willing or unwilling. And when we arrive at Rigel, I will have you mind-blocked, so you will serve me as long as you live. Oh, I'll make sure the technicians actually change very little. You'll know who you are, what you are and were, and remember everything you do. But you'll only be able to do exactly as I tell you. You'll be programmed to protect and serve only me."

"My people...Vulcan...will you destroy them?"

"That depends on your behavior until we reach Rigel, and you are...adjusted. I will alter the computer records after we leave Rigel IV for Earth. There is more possibility of failure and discovery if I wait until then, but that can't be helped. Until Rigel, you will be confined to my quarters, physically restrained, and guarded. If you resist, attempt escape, or injure me, the changes will not be made, and Vulcan will be destroyed. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Spock said hoarsely. "But if you will make the changes now, I shall be your... slave willingly, and restraint will not be necessary."

"Oh? You beg for Vulcan? But not for yourself. We'll see then..." Kirk smiled, and impulsively began to unfasten the heavy straps that held Spock down. He rose to lock both doors to the isolation room, and returned to the straps. "Now, tell me that you are my slave, and you will gladly do whatever I ask."

As Spock repeated the words, he could not keep a tremor from his voice. The last strap fell away but he didn't move.

"Now, kneel before me, and repeat the words again." Spock slowly complied.

Kirk sat on the bed, and pulled Spock up beside him. "Enough of that! I never did much care for servility anyway," he said banteringly. "Now you are going to learn your chief duty. Come closer!" He pulled Spock into his arms, so close that Spock easily could smell the brandy on Kirk's breath.

"Kiss me!"

Spock, confused and despairing, brushed his lips across Kirk's cheek; this was the kiss he had learned from his mother in surreptitious moments of tenderness. But Kirk roughly pushed him down, muttering, "You have a lot to learn.... And there are better lessons." He opened the Sickbay robe, pulling it sharply upwards, entangling it around Spock's arms. His eyes, followed by his hands, moved greedily over the chest, with its prominent pectorals, neatly arranged glossy black curls, and greenish nipples; over the concave stomach with its perfectly formed, exquisitely sensitive navel; and over the genitalia, beautifully shaped, pale green, cylindrical, with a thick, double-ridged head, surrounded by the same black curls that covered the delicate pouch beneath. Kirk toyed with the delicate organ, and the double-ridged head, then his fingers stroked down the sculptured shaft, and back to the delicate pouch, then again to the double ridges in fascination. The organ began to swell.

Spock writhed, crying out softly, "Oh, please stop...I do not understand...please! What are...you...doing?"

Kirk stood up slowly. Looking speculatively down at Spock, he asked, "Are you resisting?" He unfastened his wide gold belt, pulled off his tunic, and tossed them aside on the floor.

"No! But...I do not understand what you want of me."

Kirk yanked off his undershirt. "You really don't understand what I am going to do to you?" he said, while kicking off his right boot.

"No! I...do not," Spock insisted, watching Kirk strip with uncomprehending

amazement. Kirk pulled off his left boot, and seeing Spock's eyes on him, slowly he reached up to his fly, opened it, and reached inside teasingly, to pull out his own organ: large, partly erect, palest gold with a delicate tracery of blue veins. Letting his trousers slowly slide to the floor, Kirk caressed his own organ, pulling gently on the shaft, circling the head, squeezing the tip, as it grew larger, engorged with hot blood. He watched Spock's eyes watching him.

Stepping out of his trousers, he moved to the head of the bed. Bracing his left knee on the bed, near Spock's arm, he spread his legs, and leaned slightly toward Spock, so that Spock's field of vision was surrounded by pale-gold, downy thighs, topped by the pale-gold cock. Kirk's right hand closed around the shaft and pulled, as his left hand reached underneath to rub gently at his testicles, now drawn up into one hard lump.

Kirk gasped, "Now, do what I'm doing, but do it to yourself! Come on, I want to see you stroke it. Pull it! Squeeze it!...Harder!"

Unable to drag his eyes away from Kirk, Spock tried to comply with Kirk's demands, and gradually found himself following Kirk's lead, motion for motion, at first hardly noticing the engorgement of his own organ. But Kirk noticed, and watched triumphantly.

"Now! Open...your...mouth!" Kirk said between harsh gasps, as he backed away a little from Spock, and leaned forward over him. As Spock uncomprehendingly complied, Kirk tilted his organ downward, gave a few more hard pulls, and circling the tip rapidly with one finger, Kirk finally came with a harsh cry, his thick, creamy liquid spurting out hard, into Spock's mouth and over his face.

Recovering himself in a moment, Kirk immediately pushed Spock's hand off his green organ, then lying down on top of Spock, the hard organ pressed against his stomach, he stroked Spock's throat and sticky face. "Swallow my cream, Vulcan!" He watched the stunned, blank look on Spock's face as he complied, and traced the path of two tear tracks on either side of his face. He began to undulate gently, slowly, against Spock's organ. As his breathing began to deepen again, Kirk slid down lower and languidly began to lick the left nipple, while running his thumb lightly over the tip of the right nipple. Settling into a more comfortable position, but still pressed tightly against the hard, green organ, Kirk began to suck on the nipple, softly at first, then harder, while pinching the other nipple between thumb and forefinger. When he heard Spock gasp, and felt him tremble, Kirk rubbed his belly hard from side to side against Spock's organ, while nipping and pinching his nipples painfully.

Resigned long since to whatever was to come, Spock knew Kirk would not be pleas-

ed by a lack of response, so he had dropped his defenses completely. He did not even try to control, consoling himself with certain plans for freedom which were beginning to form in his mind. But now there was no possibility of control. Blood hot and thick as lava sang in his veins, roared in his ears, hazed his vision. A hot madness burned his flesh, swept away thought, destroyed his control. He reached up to grasp Kirk's arms, crying, "Oh...please..." helplessly. But Kirk pushed him away and rolled aside, laughing.

"You know, ever since I first saw you, I've wanted you. And now I have you! I always get what I want." He smile rakishly as his fingertips moved over Spock's body. His mutable sea-gray eyes held Spock's eyes, enjoying his domination. But, seeing the vulnerability and confusion in the deeply-shadowed eyes, Kirk's smile faded. "You really don't know what I'm doing, do you? I can't believe you've really had no experience with sex?"

"I...have had...no experience." Spock's eyes closed. A faint, green flush suffused his face. He was torn between a strong desire to push Kirk far away from him, and an equally strong desire to crush Kirk in his arms.

"A virgin! Well, you may look like a Romulan, but you certainly aren't one. Later, I want you to tell me about your life on Vulcan, but now...touch me!" Kirk urged Spock's long, supple fingers to wrap around the rose-flushed shaft. He hesitantly stroked and squeezed, feeling the warm, satiny softness over firmness. Kirk's subtle, seductive musk filled his mind, his being. When Kirk again pushed him away, he gasped in frustration. Firm hands turned him over, impatiently stroking his thighs until they parted, then moved in a persistent circular motion over his ass, squeezing hard from time to time. Spock moaned and raised his hips as one hand reached underneath to touch his organ tantalizingly. One finger trailed upwards, toward the base of his spine, over a tiny, green pucker of flesh. Spock jumped, as though he had received an electric shock, and cried out.

"Lie still, now!" Kirk ordered impatiently. He put his middle and index fingers in his mouth, lubricating them with saliva, then moved them in a circular, probing motion over the pucker and surrounding flesh. Kirk's impatience was heightened by the visible quivering of Spock's back, and the soft, muffled cries from the face buried in the rumpled bedding. Finally, Kirk felt the aperture giving way beneath his persistently pressing middle finger. The impatient finger pressed hard, but the way was tight, unyielding, and the only effect was Spock's convulsive jolt of pain.

"Relax, dammit!" Kirk rasped, as he reached underneath Spock to grab his organ roughly.

Normally, relaxing would have been easy for Spock, but now his control was gone, and pleasure/pain flooded his being, confusing and distracting him.

The questing fingers finally sank all the way in, keeping up a slow, circular motion, rubbing against the silky sides of the hot channel. A third finger joined the first two, keeping up the inexorably slow rotation within Spock. The intense pleasure of it finally overcame the discomfort. Spock moaned and lifted his hips toward the fingers, but they were pulled out and immediately replaced by the tip of Kirk's hard organ. His cheeks were held wide apart, as Kirk began to enter him, a sharp, tearing, remorseless penetration. Spock fought to gain control of himself, to control the pain. Just when the pain became unbearable and Kirk's progress was impeded, Kirk pulled out a little. Then he again pushed forward, a little further this time, only to pull out once more, then slowly in again. For Spock, the pleasure had stopped, his erection had gone. He felt sharp pain, severe cramping, and a sensation akin to having all his internal substance drawn out of his body, through his anus. Relaxation hardly helped; he could only bury his head in the bedding miserably, hoping to avoid crying out, and wait for it to end.

Kirk moved faster and faster, panting hoarsely, until he finally came, his whole body jerking with the release. He let himself fall to one side of Spock, one arm possessively over him.

In a few moments, he had recovered. Reaching out to Spock, he turned him on one side, trying to meet his eye, but Spock's stony, withdrawn gaze was focused somewhere far beyond him.

"You'll learn to like it soon enough. They tell me I'm an excellent teacher!" Kirk tried a grin, which soon faded. He rose abruptly from the bed, and pulled his clothes on. Reaching for a bundle of clothing on a nearby chair, he tossed it to Spock. "Here, put this on. You'll be staying in my cabin now, and sharing my bed. You had better learn how best to please me; Vulcan's existence depends on it. You will have a few other duties. I'll explain them later. You are not allowed to leave my cabin; it would be very dangerous to you. There's not a member of this crew, except perhaps McCoy, who would not kill you--slowly and with relish--on sight. I expect you to follow any orders I give you instantly and without question. I have filed sealed orders containing information on Vulcan, to be opened should I die and you are suspected. Now...get dressed!"

Spock concealed his disappointment at Kirk's foresight: his plan had been foreseen. He unrolled the gray jumpsuit, and rose painfully to put it on, trying to ignore Kirk's voracious eyes on his body.

Kirk unlocked the door. It slid aside, and they walked down the narrow corridor, into the turbolift, down another corridor, and into Kirk's cabin. Spock would never forget the hate-filled eyes of the few crewmen they met along the way.

"Now that you're here, you won't need that jumpsuit. Give it to me." Spock, in resentful silence, complied. "Another thing. You will answer my orders with 'Yes, sir!' at all times. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," answered Spock, tonelessly.

Kirk showed him around the cabin, explained the computer, the intercom, and the sanitary facilities, and outlined his few duties. "And now," he said, turning to Spock, "your most important duty. Get into bed. I want you again....Well?"

"Yes...sir," Spock said hoarsely.

He lay stiffly, waiting for Kirk, and tried to control a dangerous urge to strangle him in his own bed. It would be so easy to wrap his hands around that smooth column with its soft, perfect skin.... Shocked at his own thoughts, Spock resolutely turned his mind to plans for escape. He knew he needed more information before he could formulate a plan of action, and resolved to acquire as much data as he could immediately, especially concerning the layout and operation of the ship. But he did not delude himself; he knew that the possibility of escape was slim. He could not afford to jeopardize the safety of Vulcan for his own freedom; neither could he remain in a situation where his very sanity was in danger. He was so deep in thought that it was several minutes before he noticed that Kirk had returned.

He lay down beside the rigid body, turned Spock to face him, and pressing close against Spock, wrapped his arms around him. Kirk's hand traveled firmly over Spock's shoulders and back, while he nuzzled his throat. Spock lay passively, unresponsively, until Kirk's hands traveled down his spine to its base. Reflexively, he jumped back, inhaled sharply, and started to push Kirk's hands away. He stopped himself immediately, and lay taut and trembling in Kirk's arms, eyes squeezed tightly shut.

Kirk, seeing the marks of exhaustion, pain and distress written clearly on Spock's face, felt a pang of sympathy. "Relax. I'm not going to hurt you." Kirk shifted slightly, positioning his shoulder under Spock's head. Gently, he raised his free hand, and stroked the silky hair, petted comfortingly the quivering neck and shoulders, until he felt Spock gradually relax. "Sleep now. We'll continue this tomorrow," Kirk murmured. And he slept all night in Kirk's arms.

The next morning he woke gradually to find Kirk already up and moving about quietly, preparing to leave. He remained where he was, unmoving, enjoying the sensation of being warm for the first time since he was captured. He only opened his eyes when he felt Kirk quickly draw the covers back from his feet, to snap on metal anklets connected with a short, unbreakably strong chain. He pulled the covers back over Spock's hobbled feet.

Picking up several tapes from his desk, Kirk hesitated a moment, then returned to the bedside. Gently he touched Spock's hair, and whispered, "I'll be back before lunch. Stay here and sleep if you want."

After drowsing in bed for awhile, Spock rose, showered, and wrapping the cover from the bed around himself, sat at the computer and began his search for information. He was interrupted by a visitor, McCoy, who arrived bearing a large platter of fruit, bread, and a synthetic high-protein concentrate. He also brought a medical kit, and immediately set about checking Spock's arm.

"Well! Your arm is healing just fine. Jim was concerned about you; he asked me to come and check you out. You do seem run down. Be sure to get lots of sleep for the next few days, and don't forget to eat!... How are things going?" McCoy asked carefully.

"I am all right, Doctor." Spock pulled the blanket over his shoulders again, and held it closed tightly over his chest.

"Look, if you need anything, or just want to talk, you can almost always find me in Sickbay. Drop in whenever you want to. Unless I'm operating or there's some emergency, I'm always in to my friends...and I'd like you to be one."

"I...thank you Doctor, but I am not allowed to leave this cabin. In any case, I am not allowed clothes and...it is not safe...."

"No clothes?! And you're cold, aren't you? Well, I'll see about that! I'll talk to Kirk right away, and...."

"Please, Doctor. That is not necessary. I will be all right," Spock interrupted, "but I do appreciate your offer of help."

"My offer is still open. If you can't come to me, just call me on the intercom, and I'll come to you."

After McCoy left, Spock resumed his research, sitting huddled in his blanket. Soon after, a subdued Kirk returned, and immediately started rummaging in his wardrobe, finally pulling out a heavy robe. Handing it to Spock, he said, "Here, wear this until I can find you something better. I'll turn up the heat in here, too." As Spock stood to put the robe on, Kirk moved behind him to help him on with it, then pulled him into a hard embrace. "I'm sorry; I didn't know you were cold. Next time, tell me if there is something you need." His voice dropped to a hoarse whisper, "I only wanted to be able to see your body whenever I chose." He released Spock reluctantly and, without another word, sat down at his desk to work. Soon after, he left again.

Spock was left to his own devices for the rest of the day, until late that evening, when Kirk finally returned, smiling a greeting. After he showered, he strode to Spock's side, and removed the ankle chain. Taking his hand, he said, "Come to bed now. We'll have a chance to talk tomorrow, since I am off duty."

As Spock rose resignedly to his feet, Kirk removed the robe, and gazed at him hungrily, then guided him towards the bed. "Today, my ownership claim was recorded and approved. You became my property officially."

Kirk pulled the cover aside and drew Spock down beside him. "And I did as I promised you. I couldn't completely remove knowledge of the existence of Vulcan from the computer records, but I did make it appear that it was nothing but a barren planetoid, like the place we found you, with a tiny, transient population that would be long gone when we returned. I can't promise you that my deception will work. Too many people know. There's Pike, the Fleet Captain: he's sharp--and dangerous!" His fingertips moved up Spock's arms, over his shoulders, down his chest. "When we reach Earth and he's promoted, maybe he'll have more important things to think about than Vulcan." He began to massage Spock's thighs in long strokes, from knees up to the dark curls, then over the stomach, and down the hips.

With carefully controlled dismay, Spock wondered just how much of this particular activity Kirk was prepared to engage in. He was afraid to respond to Kirk's caresses, but unable to resist.

Drawing him into a gentle embrace, Kirk brushed his lips against Spock's cheek, breathed gently into his ear, circled its inner rim with his tongue, then pushed his tongue-tip carefully into the very sensitive opening. Spock shuddered and gasped in spite of himself. Kirk's tongue worked its way persistently downward, over neck, chest, nipples, navel, down to thighs, and finally around the base of the greenish organ, now beginning to stiffen. He began to suck slowly, skillfully at the organ. Spock surrendered to the growing pleasure without regret. His hands moved to Kirk's shoulder and the back of his head, but Kirk evaded the hands, moving around so his own heavy cock was within easy reach of Spock's mouth.

Spock gasped and writhed when Kirk pulled away. His hands trailed over the smooth body, not wanting to let it escape, but not bold enough to pull it back. He watched Kirk's maneuver, savoring his unique scent hungrily, but not knowing how to satiate that hunger. He stared mesmerized at the beautiful thighs, beautiful cock, hesitantly reaching one hand to touch.

"Suck me," whispered Kirk. Spock just looked at him, frozen. Kirk sat up and drew Spock's head into his lap, petted his smooth hair, nudging his cock at Spock's lips.

Opening his lips, Spock tasted the sweet flesh, automatically beginning to suck, drawing it further and further down his throat, until his nose brushed the golden curls surrounding it.

Carefully lying back and repositioning himself, Kirk again drew the hard green organ into his mouth and began sucking languorously. Reaching over and through Spock's

legs, he began caressing the backs of his thighs, squeezing his buttocks. Spock unconsciously echoed the gestures as well as he was able. He was unaware of anything except the hunger in his soul, assuaged only by the cool flesh in his mouth, his hot flesh in Kirk's mouth. His nerves drew up into hard, tight knots. He felt on the verge of something significant, unknown, dangerous, and he was desperately afraid, but unable to alter this reality. He tried to pull away when he felt a finger entering him, rotating, but he moved with it instead, and it was like a flame inside him, consuming him. To escape it, he sucked harder, faster at the organ moving gently in his mouth. Convulsing, writhing, bursting apart into a million dying stars, like a nova... and he came. He would have cried out, but his mouth was filled with hot plasma from another nova....

Centuries later, his consciousness surfaced, surrounded by a delicious lassitude and a pair of muscular arms. Lips brushed his cheek. He fell asleep again.

When he next woke, it was late morning. Kirk was pressed against his back, one arm flung over his hip. As he stirred, Kirk stirred also, so he turned over to meet warm golden eyes smiling at him. Kirk raised himself up on one elbow, kissed Spock gently on the lips, and said, "Let's get up. I'm hungry!"

Kirk spent all that day in his cabin, talking to Spock about Vulcan, Earth, the Romulans, the VENGEANCE, technology, and galactic economics. He didn't press Spock when he showed reluctance to discuss a topic. Sometimes, Kirk reached out to touch Spock's arm; although he didn't pull away, neither did he respond. They ate their meals together, and after dinner, Kirk pulled out a tri-dimensional chess set, and began to teach Spock how to play. He had discovered Spock's fondness for music so, after he showed Spock how to program the computer for music, he set it for some of his favorite Earth music, and left to do a brief, final check around the ship, as was his custom. After returning and getting ready for bed, he again took Spock by the hand and led him to bed.

They made love that night and again in the morning. Spock was no more successful at controlling than he had been previously. The inquisitive fingers always found him, penetrating like flames, and eventually Spock began to welcome them. The next five days were much the same: quiet talk, quiet meals, chess, music, and lovemaking nights and mornings. They were nearing Rigel now, by a carefully circuitous route, on the lookout for Romulan ships, and soon Kirk would be needed on the Bridge again.

On the fifth night, Kirk lay, holding Spock, stroking his cheek, "Tomorrow, if you'd like, I'll show you the ship. That is, if you don't mind the crew's stares.... You don't have to worry about being mind-blocked on Rigel IV. And I destroyed those orders I told you about, the ones to be

opened in case of my death. I was afraid you might be falsely accused if something happened to me. The life of a pirate is a hazardous one; I wouldn't want you to suffer if I died."

Spock amazed himself by impulsively pulling Kirk into his arms. They stayed that way for some time, then Kirk's muffled voice said, "Spock...Spock, I want you tonight!" He pulled back from Spock, and looked at him inquiringly. Spock nodded slightly, and closing his eyes, murmured, "I am yours."

Kirk exercised all his skill and tenderness on Spock that night. He sucked the pale green organ, and licked the tender sac beneath. His tongue trailed down the greenish crevice, and teased the tiny pucker of flesh within, until it began to relax. Carefully easing a finger inside and rotating it in slow circles, he returned to the hard shaft, licking a swathe upwards, then around the head.

The finger withdrew for a few seconds, and returned, joined by a second finger covered with something cool and slippery. Spock lifted his hips, and found himself wishing that the fingers could penetrate much deeper, and move faster and harder. The next moment, he felt Kirk's organ pressing into him. It was almost as uncomfortable as the first time, but after the initial shock, he hardly noticed, because Kirk's hand was wrapped hard around his organ, squeezing and pumping it, and the other hand was squeezing and pinching his nipples. In spite of the pain, he began to feel the same pleasure he had felt from Kirk's fingers inside him. He began to move his hips, pushing against the impaling organ, moving faster as he felt the tension build. The exquisite sensations were not as localized as before, but seemed rather to fill his whole body. He was no longer conscious of himself as a discrete entity named Spock, no longer aware of even the possibility of control. When he reached completion, it was like being blown apart into his constituent atoms, but instead of pain, there was the most intense pleasure and there was joy. He cried out like a lost soul.

The next morning, Kirk arose early. He proudly presented Spock with a tunic and trousers of deepest midnight blue in a rich, satiny fabric, warmly lined; a textured silver belt; and low, black boots. He helped Spock get dressed, then moved back to inspect the results. "I'm glad to see they fit so well. I had them specially made for you, you know. ...You look quite elegant!" Kirk drew Spock's hands into his own, and looked at him intently. "Do you still want to see the ship? There's a lot of hostility in the crew against anyone that looks Romulan. Can you manage?"

"Yes, sir. I would very much like to see the ship."

"Okay. We'll take the grand tour first, then you can come with me to the bridge. Be sure to stay with me, and don't

wander off." Kirk quickly pulled on his trousers and a cream-colored tunic, and they left.

For the next few hours, Kirk showed him the various laboratories, Engineering, Life Support, the cramped shuttle bay with its two tiny craft, seldom used because of their limited range, relative inefficiency, and the inevitable loss of precious air, and several other departments, ending in Sickbay.

"Well now! I'm glad to see you two, and looking so healthy! It can't be my professional services you want then," McCoy welcomed them.

"No, Bones. Just your company. We've been taking a grand tour of the ship," Kirk grinned.

"So, what do you think of the VENGEANCE, Spock?" McCoy asked as he ushered them into his office, and found them chairs.

"Very interesting, Doctor. I do not think I have seen the whole ship, however."

"You've seen everything but the storage holds, the crewman's quarters, and the bridge--which you'll see soon now," Kirk replied. "I'm due there in 28 minutes."

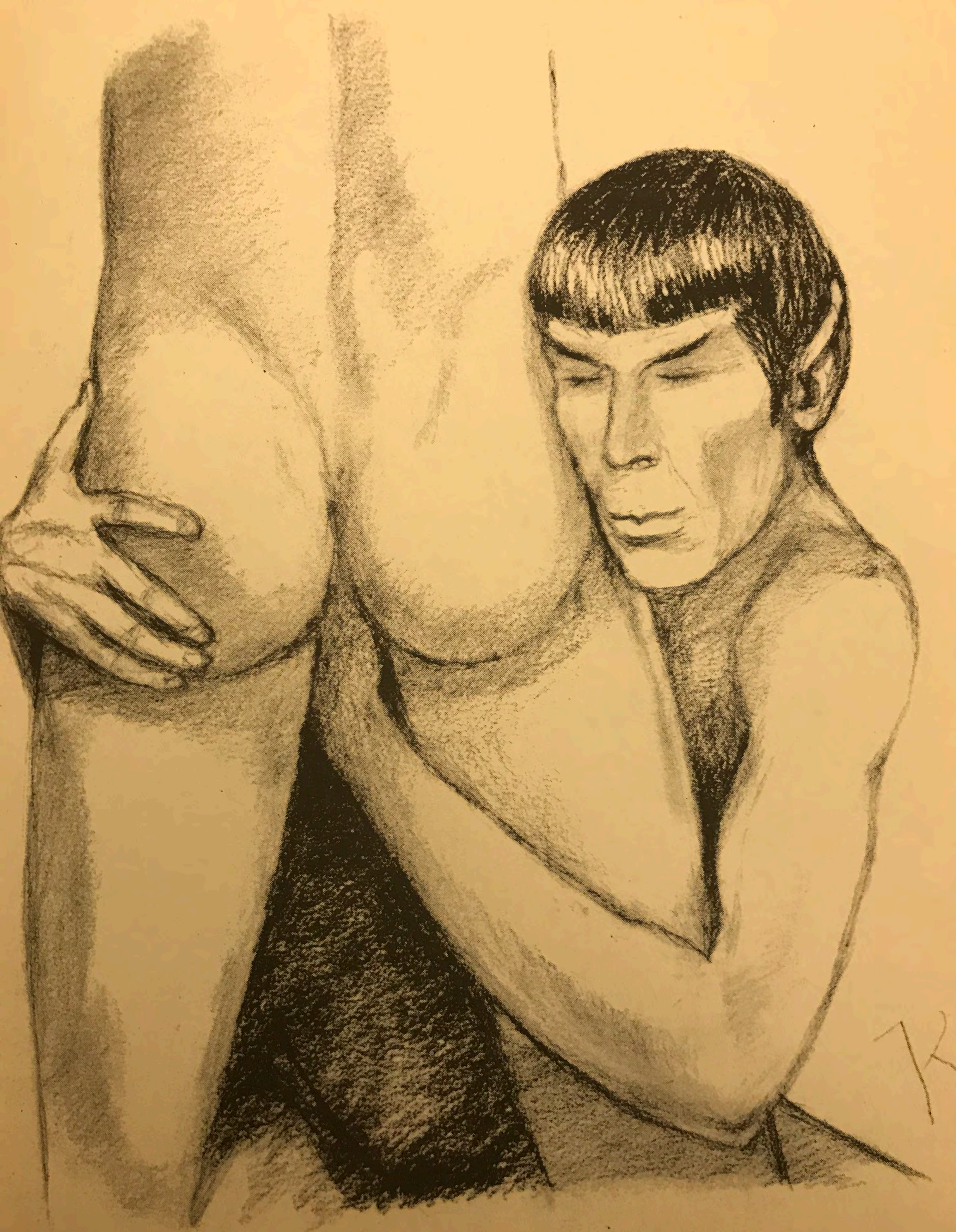
McCoy shared a quick breakfast of coffee, toast, and fruit juice with them. Spock made a face at his first taste of coffee, and set the cup down hurriedly.

Walking at Spock's side on the way to bridge, Kirk tended to glare at random crewmembers crossing their path, as though to warn against any hostile behavior directed toward Spock. When they reached the bridge, Kirk relieved Mr. Scott, stood by his command chair, and gaining the attention of the bridge crew, said firmly, "This is Spock, a scientist among his people. Although he physically resembles a Romulan, he is not. His people too have fought them and suffered. Kirk paused and looked around meaningfully. "He is mine...my responsibility, and I will not tolerate interference. Is that clear?" He was answered by nods and murmured agreement--and several slightly sullen looks.

Sitting in the command chair, Spock standing at his side, Kirk rapidly reviewed ship's status. Certain that there was no pressing business at hand, Kirk rose, and guiding Spock to each post in turn, explained in detail their functions and operations. Spock's eager curiosity, barely controlled, and his quick comprehension, delighted Kirk. One very astute question concerning warp drive operation, was referred to Mr. Scott. Reserved and suspicious at first, Scott became involved in discussion of his favorite topic, and soon found himself warming considerably toward Spock. Kirk watched the two, somewhat amused and with, he uncomfortably admitted to himself, just a little jealousy.



The pirate ships continued to travel through space toward Rigel at a leisurely



pace, in a loose aggregate for safety in case of detection. Nothing was detected on the long-range sensors however, so the day passed uneventfully. At the end of the work shift, Kirk and Spock returned to the cabin together. For the next few days, Spock was offered the opportunity to accompany Kirk to the bridge, and he did so with thinly disguised enthusiasm. He was even allowed to assist at helm, navigation, and the science station, under the supervision of the crewman in charge. Although he never acted very sociable, neither did he act in the least like a Romulan, so the crew came to accept and respect him. Some even came to feel a certain fondness for him. The few truly hostile crewmen might derisively mutter to each other about "the Captain's Romulan whore", but they dared not make any trouble.

Spock immersed himself in studying bridge control operations, and technological knowledge not available on Vulcan. His plans for escape were pushed far back in his mind. He seldom thought of Vulcan, his mother and father, and his bondmate-to-be, now lost to him forever. When his time came, he would not be there, and she would choose another. Even if he escaped and returned to her, she would surely challenge because of his relationship with Kirk. His status on Vulcan as a unique half-breed, unaccepted and maligned, and his disagreements with his father which had forced him to leave Vulcan, did not encourage thoughts of homesickness. He had never had a close relationship with anyone, except his mother when he was a young child. He had never lived so close to anyone, as he now lived to Kirk. He found their relationship strange, disquieting. But, when Kirk was not in the same room with him, he felt a strange sense of loss. He realized that a tenuous mental bond was forming between them.

Kirk, pleased with Spock's obedience and cooperation, never again chained him after the first time, and gave him increasing freedom. He was allowed to visit the gym at certain scheduled times, and visit Sickbay and Engineering whenever he wished. He was allowed to speak with anyone he chose. Kirk enjoyed providing him with warm, attractive clothing, and made sure that Spock was adequately fed and rested. Spock's few requests were quickly granted. When Kirk stopped to think about it, he began to feel that Spock must have some kind of hold over him, and he would feel constrained to remind Spock, "You belong to me, you know!" and Spock would always nod, and say quietly, "Yes, sir." But he had no real complaints, and certainly was quite gratified at Spock's increasing responsiveness in bed. He would caress Kirk without being urged, actively participate in, and enjoy the loving, and hold Kirk in his arms sometimes afterwards.

Arrival at Rigel IV was uneventful. Some of the ships kept watch further out in the Rigel system, while others were chosen to orbit the fourth planet, beam down cargo, and trade it for dilithium and other goods needed by Earth, and its ships. The VENGEANCE was one of the ships so chosen.

Spock decided if he did not attempt to escape now, he would not get a better opportunity. He read everything he could find about the trading planet in hopes he could beam down somehow, and escape. So, when Kirk asked him if he'd like to accompany him to the surface, he readily agreed. Spock mulled over the probabilities of success of various plans all the day before the beamdown. He knew that there were only two ways to ensure that Kirk would tell no one what he knew of Vulcan: kill him or kidnap him. But he could not kill Kirk, and it seemed impossible that he could keep Kirk immobilized or unconscious indefinitely in some hiding place, but he was going to try. He very much wanted to steal a small, fast ship, return to Vulcan, warn them of the probability of another attack by the pirates, and help them prepare their defenses with the technological information he had gleaned. Being logical, and a realist, he had to admit to himself that his efforts might make no difference; there was too much he didn't know and could not predict, but he had to try.

The next morning, Kirk presented him with a communicator, a translator, a few credit chips, and a very splendid, rich green tunic and trousers. Whenever Spock moved, green flames seemed to lick at his body. Kirk grinned when he saw Spock's uplifted eyebrows at the phenomenon. He pulled on a rich, red tunic, open almost to the waist, with the same leaping-flames phenomenon. "It's a very special cloth I bought for myself the last time I was here, but I'd rather look at it on you! It comes from some strange planet near the edge of the galaxy, I'm told; no one seems to know its name or location. Probably raided and destroyed by the Romulans long ago." He checked Spock's equipment, and caught Spock to him in a quick embrace. "By law, I am supposed to identify you somehow as my slave. Most use special clothing with identifying marks. I don't want to do that to you. So, for the time we are on the planet, I will treat you as a member of my crew. I am trusting you to behave better than the average crewman! You won't try to escape? I'd have to find you and bring you back, the authorities would find out... and they are very efficient, and merciless to escaped slaves, especially 'disguised' ones."

Looking down into Kirk's large green-gold eyes, Spock said, "No, I will not try to escape," and at that moment he meant it.

Lt. Sulu, two Security men, McCoy, Kirk and Spock beamed down together to the planet. They left the beam-down point, and walked down a wide street. Spock looked around him in fascination. Buildings in many styles of architecture lined each side, shack to multi-storied complex, each with a garish sign in several languages, advertising goods for sale. He unobtrusively committed several addresses to memory. In the street itself were stalls and vendors of all kinds, richer, more varied and colorful than any oriental bazaar of old Earth. Spock identified a dozen races: Andorian, Zaranite, Tellarite, Caitian, Klingon, Arcturian, Orion, Rigelian, Kzin...

and there were many more he could not identify. Some were not humanoid. The din was terrific: shouting in many languages, music from many planets, scraping, pounding.... Finally they reached their first goal, a dealer in refined rare metals.

"Well, Jim, I'll see you later. Maybe at 'Joy's' this afternoon?" McCoy asked.

"Yeah, Bones. 'Joy's' it is!" Kirk grinned, "I'll be looking forward to it."



There wasn't much to see in the gray, featureless office, so Spock sat and waited patiently while Kirk and Sulu bargained to sell the loot in the holds of the VENGEANCE. Sulu and the two Security men remained behind to supervise beamdown of the cargo, while Kirk and Spock proceeded on to the second, and last, business stop.

"Anything can be had on this planet for a price: computer components, drugs... anything," Kirk explained as they threaded their way through a number of malodorous food stalls. "We are headed for the slave dealers now. Some of the Fleet have Romulan captives for sale, and I have to make sure before they are beamed down, that there is enough room for them to be confined here." Kirk glanced at Spock, sensitive to his discomfiture. "We won't be long. Then we'll go find some lunch, and do a little shopping. If there is anything you'd like, I'll get it for you."

"No, Sir, I do not require anything," Spock said stiffly. They continued on in silence, until they arrived at a particularly garish building.

"Aaaaahhh, Kirk! It has been months since I've seen you! Have you some fresh... material to sell us today?" An Orion slave dealer, much taller and broader than Spock, greeted them effusively, his eyes drawn immediately to Spock, traveling up and down the lithe body.

"Greetings, Darvat," Kirk replied coolly. "We have 39 Romulan captives in good condition, plus 12 injured. Three of those are in serious condition; if you want to bother with them, you can have them free. If you have the space, I'll contact the Fleet, and arrange to have them beamed down tomorrow."

"Yes, that will be excellent. Stay and talk with me awhile, Kirk. I have some tidbits of gossip you'd enjoy hearing I'm sure, like the location and movements of certain Romulan fleets." Darvat's voice dropped to a whisper.

"All right, we'll stay for a few moments only, Darvat."

"Certainly." Darvat ushered them into a barbarously splendid room, where they sat down on fat, scarlet cushions. He summoned a slave, a naked Romulan boy, mindless and sexless, who approached bearing a tray with three glasses of a gold liqueur.

"And who is this, Kirk? You're not going to tell me that you now use Romulans in your crew! I'd guess you've finally taken yourself a slave, and an excellent choice, too!" Darvat turned and spoke directly to Spock, "Stand up and strip, slave!"

Spock froze, but his eyes sought Kirk's. Setting his drink down, Kirk rose. "Come on, Spock. It's time we went elsewhere."

"Captain, Captain! I'm sorry. Please sit down. The Romulans have been seen all over this area recently, and, as my good friend, you should be told all the details." After Kirk reluctantly sat again, Darvat added, "But first I must know about Spock. Then you'll get your information. You'll be glad you stayed to hear it, I guarantee."

"Yes. Spock is my property, but he is not a Romulan," Kirk said unwillingly.

"So! I have heard a rumor of a planet of Romulanoids in this quadrant, all philosophers and scientists; a peace-loving people without the vile Romulan temperament. I do congratulate you on your choice, Kirk. I have been looking for one such as this for myself for years. I'll pay you 20,000 credits for him."

"No. He is not for sale at any price."

"40,000 then!"

"No. Now, how about that information?"

With a frustrated sigh, Darvat complied. As soon afterwards as possible, Kirk and Spock left.

In deference to Spock's taste, Kirk found a small, quiet restaurant with a large selection of vegetable and fruit dishes compatible with Spock's biochemistry. Spock remained very withdrawn and quiet; he would not touch his food until Kirk ordered him to eat.

"Spock. Tell me what's wrong," Kirk ordered, grasping Spock's arm.

"Does it really matter to you?"

"Yes, it matters. It's not like you to act like this. I'm sorry about Darvat; he is a repulsive louse. But you do know I'd never sell you, don't you? You're mine, and I'll never let anyone else touch you."

"Would it please you to know that you were property, a slave?"

"No. But maybe it wouldn't be so bad, depending on my owner. Spock, I can't free you, and I won't! But I won't do to you what Darvat did to that boy, either--unless you force me to.... Now, finish your meal. We have some shopping to do."

They entered a different part of the market. A stunning variety of cultural artifacts from every planet were available: all





kinds of decorated objects, woven things, sculpture, pottery, ornate cast metals, paintings, embroidered and decorated cloths, jewelry, precious stones, ornamental furniture, and musical instruments. While examining a tiny, perfect statue of a multi-breasted Andorian fertility goddess, carved out of an aquamarine, Kirk glanced over at the next stall, and noticed Spock was staring at a harp-like musical instrument.

There, in the midst of Andorian skri, Kzinti ss-khekha, Terran guitars, and Zaranite drums, sat one Vulcan lytherette. Spock persuaded the reluctant merchant to hand it down to him. "Handle that with care, Romulan! I don't know what it is, but it looks to be of great value. See the inlay work there? All rare metals, natural stones. And intricate! A beautiful piece of work."

Spock brushed the accumulated dust off the instrument, and reverently touched the ancient symbols inlaid into the rare txtan wood. Seeing that most of the strings were intact, he tuned the lytherette with skill and alacrity, before the owner could object. Brushing his fingers softly over the strings, he played the first sweet, sad phrase of an ancient, pre-Reform Vulcan love song. Kirk stood entranced at Spock's elbow, listening intently, Andorian fertility goddess forgotten.

"How much?" Kirk asked the proprietor.

"20,000 credits."

"Ridiculous! It's not worth more than 5,000."

"15,000 and not one credit less!" said the proprietor in outraged tones.

"10,000 and not one credit more!" snapped Kirk.

"You will put me out of business! The instrument is very rare, and absolutely unavailable elsewhere."

"Which probably means you will never again find anyone willing to buy it. My offer stands," Kirk said adamantly.

"All right, all right! 12,000 and I'll include the case it came in for nothing."

"And you'll see that it is safely delivered to my ship, the VENGEANCE, immediately."

Kirk concluded negotiations with the grumbling merchant, and paid the 12,000 credits, as Spock carefully placed the instrument into its case. He glanced at Kirk's credit identification number as the papers changed hands, and committed it to memory. After they walked away, Kirk turned to Spock with a wry smile, "Well, I would have paid the 20,000 if necessary, but I didn't want to go into debt. Come on and let's do some more window-shopping before we meet McCoy."

"I am grateful for the lytherette, but I would not have asked you for it. It

is an even more ancient and beautiful instrument than my father's, and very valuable. How could that merchant have found such a rare Vulcan antique?"

"He'd never tell you how he happened to get it, but it was probably sold to him by one of the many traders, thieves, and pirates that deal with the merchants here. Probably the trader who sold it to him doesn't even know where it came from; it may have passed through several hands. And don't worry about the cost. I still have money left. I'm only a little short this time because I took you as my share of the loot in the last raids." Kirk glanced up at Spock with twinkling eyes. "Anyway, it is another...instrument you can entertain me with now!"

By late afternoon, they found "The House of Delights", known universally as "Joy's", and popular for its diverse entertainments, from liquor and food in the front, to comfortable, private rooms for sex, gambling, drugs, and stranger delights in the back rooms. It was an establishment of higher class than most, and lavishly decorated. They were joined by McCoy and served by slaves, mauve-skinned, slight of build, and graceful; dressed in scanty costumes ornamented with metal dangles that jingled musically as they moved.

Spock sat quietly, trying to think out everything that might go wrong with his plan, as Kirk and McCoy talked, laughed and drank. He looked at Kirk's smiling face covertly, wondering what Kirk would do to him if he failed and was recaptured: Would he be sold to Darvat, or simply subjected to their mind-controlling device, and if it didn't work on him, would he then be killed?

After they had finished eating a light meal, and Kirk started drinking in earnest, Spock excused himself. Heading toward the sanitary facilities, he detoured at the last moment toward a privacy booth and, through the planetary communications network, contacted one of the addresses he had carefully memorized. Identifying himself as Kirk, and giving Kirk's credit identification code, he arranged to have a small, fast warp-drive ship fully equipped, supplied with extra fuel and food, and ready for him to leave in a few hours. If possible, he intended to wait until the middle of the night to leave, but he was concerned about how fast his deception would be discovered. Had he been Human, his nerves would have given him away, but he was able to return calmly to the table, and patiently await an opportunity to get Kirk alone. He still did not know exactly how he would proceed from there. He decided to play it "by ear", as Kirk would say.

In his absence, their party had increased by two, friends of McCoy and Kirk from previous visits, female, and flamboyantly attractive. Kirk sat with his arm around one of them, an orange-haired, rather narrow-faced alien, spectacularly built, and with a talented, prehensile tail. She stroked his hair, and

her eyes, huge and slit-pupiled, never left his face as he spoke to her. In the short length of time Spock had been away from the table, Kirk had obviously completely forgotten that he existed. Spock sat silently with eyes averted, a strange, hollow feeling in his stomach.

The female, he called her Saa-a, slithered into Kirk's lap, and offered him a dope-stick. He puffed on it, while her hands slipped up underneath his tunic, and began to explore. He stroked her thigh. McCoy, similarly engaged with a dark-haired Human female, came up for air, and gasped, "Let's dance." Both couples rose, Kirk swaying slightly, and headed for the dance floor. Spock watched Kirk and Saa-a writhe around each other in an Orion dance with all the subtlety of a primitive fertility ritual, and tried to control dark emotions new to him, emotions he could not understand. The dance ended and another began without a pause, a slow, suggestive dance. That was followed by a lively Andorian peasant dance, and another Orion dance.

Spock's eyes followed Kirk's body across the dance floor, watching how it moved in complete abandon, wondering how it would feel to hold Kirk in his arms now; to take him and feel his surrender. Spock fought to control his desperate longing, the heat rising in his loins.

Kirk and Saa-a spun out of the dance near the table, followed by McCoy and his partner, and immediately fell into a long, deep kiss. McCoy distractedly left some credit chips on the table for all of them. When Kirk finally pulled away from Saa-a, his face was flushed and his eyes brilliant. He turned to Spock without really seeing him, and ordered, "Return to the ship. We'll be staying a little longer, but we'll return before 02:00, breaking orbit and leaving shortly after that."

The words made no immediate sense to Spock, whose eyes were locked on Kirk in fury. But Kirk did not even notice. His attention returned immediately to Saa-a, and the two couples walked briskly away, toward the private rooms. Spock sat unmoving for awhile. Finally, calling one of the slaves to him, he located the "Joy's" manager and ascertained by careful questioning how many exits the establishment had, where they were located, and Kirk's likeliest route. He used a few credit chips to bribe the Rigellian to tell him when Kirk left.

He waited in the shade of some ornamental trees in a small park near the "Joy's" entrance, at the manager's suggestion. A slow, steady rain began to fall. It was nearly 1:30 when one of the little slaves slipped out of the entrance, and stealthily moved toward Spock. "Sir. The one who came with the one you seek, the Human, McCoy, is also looking for the one you seek, Kirk the Captain. We know what room he went in; we have watched carefully. But no one left, and no one is there now. We cannot understand....See! McCoy leaves now for the beam-up point. He tried to contact the

Kirk Human on his communications device. But there was no answer. What shall we do now?"

"That is not logical. If he did not leave, and he is not there, where is he?"

"I do not know, Sir!" the little slave said desperately. "I will return and look again." Before Spock could reply, he had slipped away again. Spock stood, trying to think without success of a logical plan of action, when his communicator beeped. Thinking it could be Kirk, he answered it, "Spock here."

"Spock, where are you?!" McCoy's frantic voice spoke.

"Almost at the beam-up point, Doctor. I was preparing to return."

"Have you seen the Captain? I can't find him, and he isn't answering his communicator! Something may have happened to him!"

"No, Doctor, I do not know where he is."

"Mr. Scott tells me that the authorities don't approve of the planet being sensor-scanned by anyone but them. We can't get through their shields. And I don't want to tell them we've misplaced a Captain just yet. We can't even send down Security squads to search. We're due to break orbit no later than 04:00."

"Doctor," Spock said calmly, "I may be able to find him. Let me look, at least for an hour."

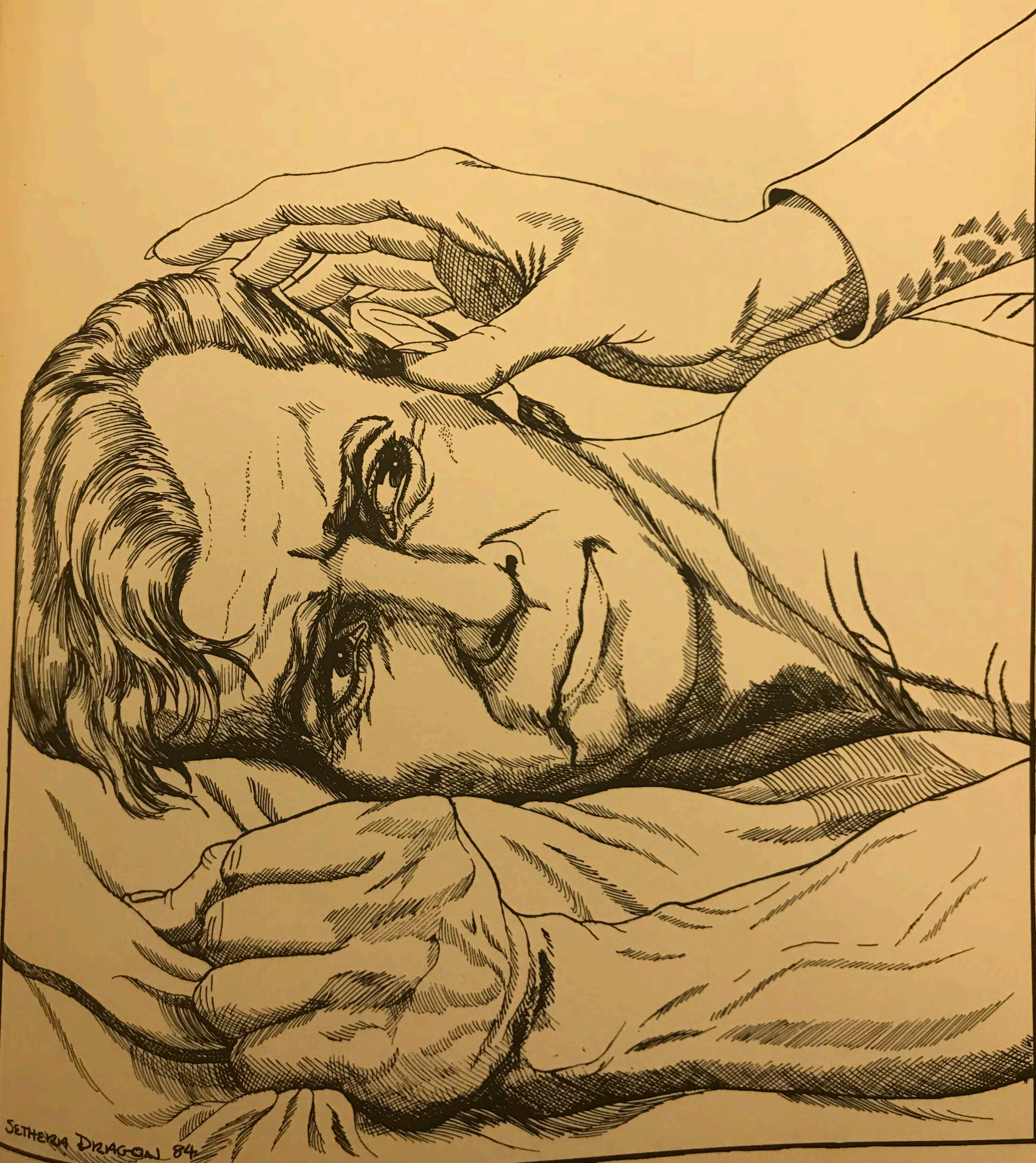
"I don't know how you expect to find him when I couldn't, and the manager couldn't!"

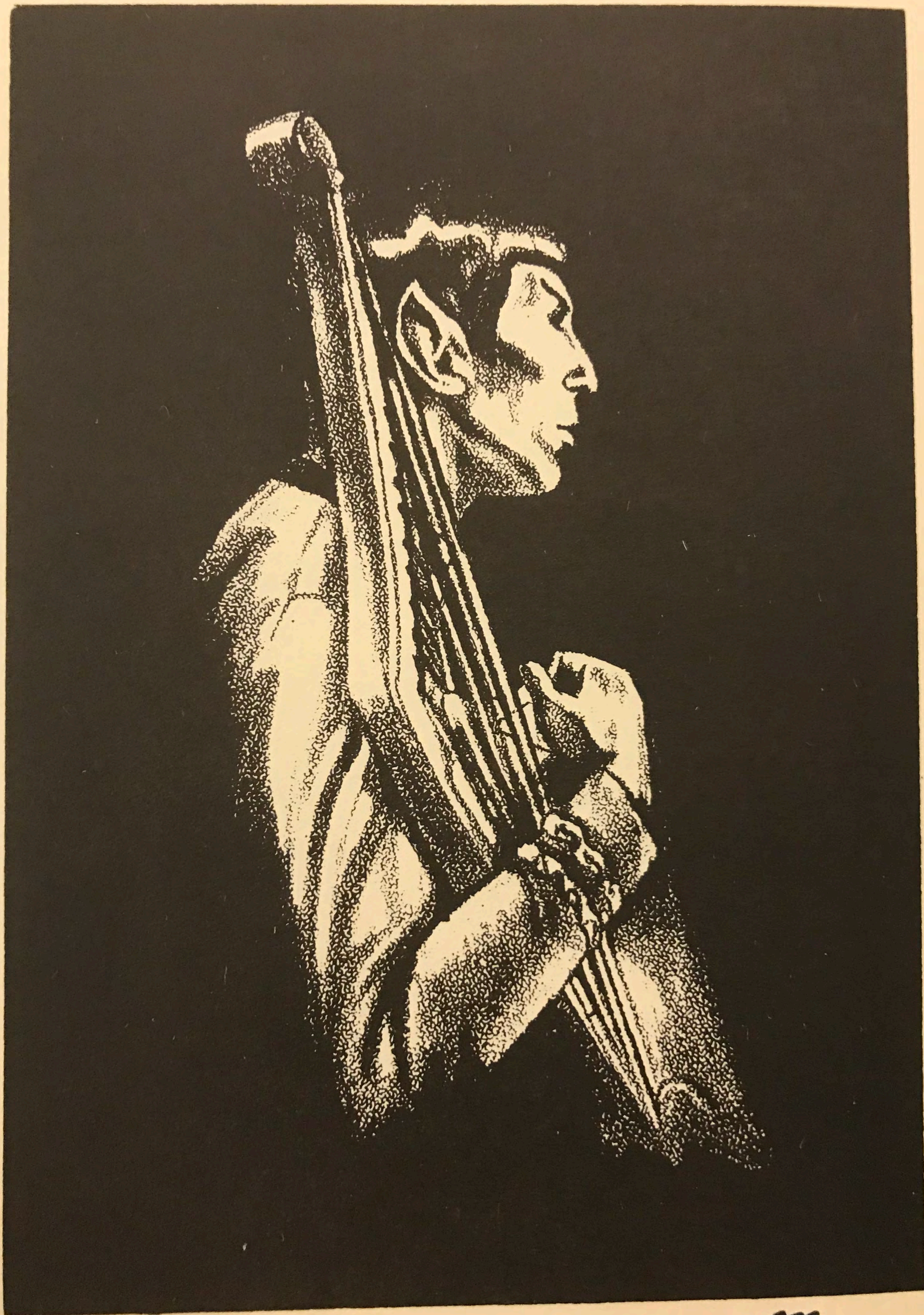
"I'll be in touch with you, Doctor. Spock out."

He resolutely blocked all sensation and thought from his mind, and went into a light trance. A very faint presence drew him, and he began to walk in the direction of its increasing strength, for .71 kilometer. In a cul-de-sac behind a merchant's shack, in a huddled heap wet with rain and blood, he found what he sought. Kirk had been severely beaten, and was still unconscious. Spock knelt beside him, carefully raising his head, and resting it in his lap. He leaned close and called, "Jim! Jim! Wake up! JIM!"

Kirk's eyelids fluttered open, and he gazed up, unfocused, at Spock. He tried to wind his arms around Spock's neck, and smiled, "Mmmmm, Spock! Spock, I'm so glad you're here...." but his words ended in a gurgle as a steady stream of blood gushed from his nose. He fell back unconscious, and began to vomit. Spock held him so that he would not choke to death.

Spock had a choice of leaving Kirk to die in the street, and escaping alone in the ship which was waiting for him, or contacting McCoy to beam down and help Kirk. He knew that without McCoy's aid, Kirk would die.





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Since McCoy's continued presence would probably be necessary to Kirk's recovery, he would have to take McCoy with him also. As he flipped open his communicator, he didn't even try to convince himself that he had made the logical decision.

McCoy ignored planetary regulations, and beamed directly down, near Spock. Dropping to Kirk's side, he examined him quickly with the medical tricorder, and gently moved his fingers over Kirk's head. "Spock, we have to get him back to the VENGEANCE immediately. I can't do anything for him here. Call them for an emergency beam-up! Jim's got a bad concussion. He's in a coma, dying!" Spock hardly hesitated. As they disappeared in a swirl of golden motes, Spock was already planning how he could beam back down to the planet later and escape, before the VENGEANCE broke orbit.

They were met in the transporter room by medical personnel with a stretcher and emergency life support equipment. Efficiently and quickly Kirk was taken to Sickbay. Spock trailed along, ignored, and watched as Kirk was put under a sterile field, and McCoy began to operate to relieve the pressure of a depressed skull fracture. It was 02:35. Almost an hour later, McCoy put a temporary dressing on the fracture, and put Kirk on total life support. He stripped off his surgical gloves, dropped into the nearest chair, and put his face in his hands.

"I'm losing him! He lay out there in the rain too long, too long...oh, God, why couldn't I have known earlier, and gone to him...."

"Doctor," Spock shook his shoulder gently, "what is the problem exactly?"

McCoy looked up uncomprehendingly for a moment, then replied, "He's not responding. His mind is gone. I can keep his body alive indefinitely, but he'll be a vegetable. Oh, someday he might come out of the coma, maybe, but I doubt it. And even if he does, he may not be...whole."

"Doctor, I may be able to reach his mind. Will you trust me?"

"What do you mean, 'reach his mind'?"

"Please! Trust me," Spock said urgently.

McCoy nodded hopelessly, and Spock immediately strode to Kirk's side. Pushing aside a piece of equipment that was in his way, Spock gently touched Kirk's swollen face, avoiding the worst of his injuries. "My mind to your mind...."

At that point, Spock might still have escaped, but he chose instead to follow the route of Kirk's disappearing consciousness in the tortuous pathways of his brain. 04:00 came and went, the VENGEANCE broke orbit and left the Rigel system, and Spock was still lost in the labyrinth, trying to fan a tiny ember of consciousness into a strong flame. If Kirk's will had not been so strong, it would have been impossible. But, with Spock's help, the flame grew.

Kirk moaned and stirred, calling out, "Bones?"

Before the word had died on Kirk's lips, McCoy was pushing Spock away, to stand at Kirk's side. "Yes, Jim! You're going to be all right now!" As McCoy began to clear away the now unnecessary life support equipment, Kirk smiled at him, "Thanks, Bones...can always count on you."

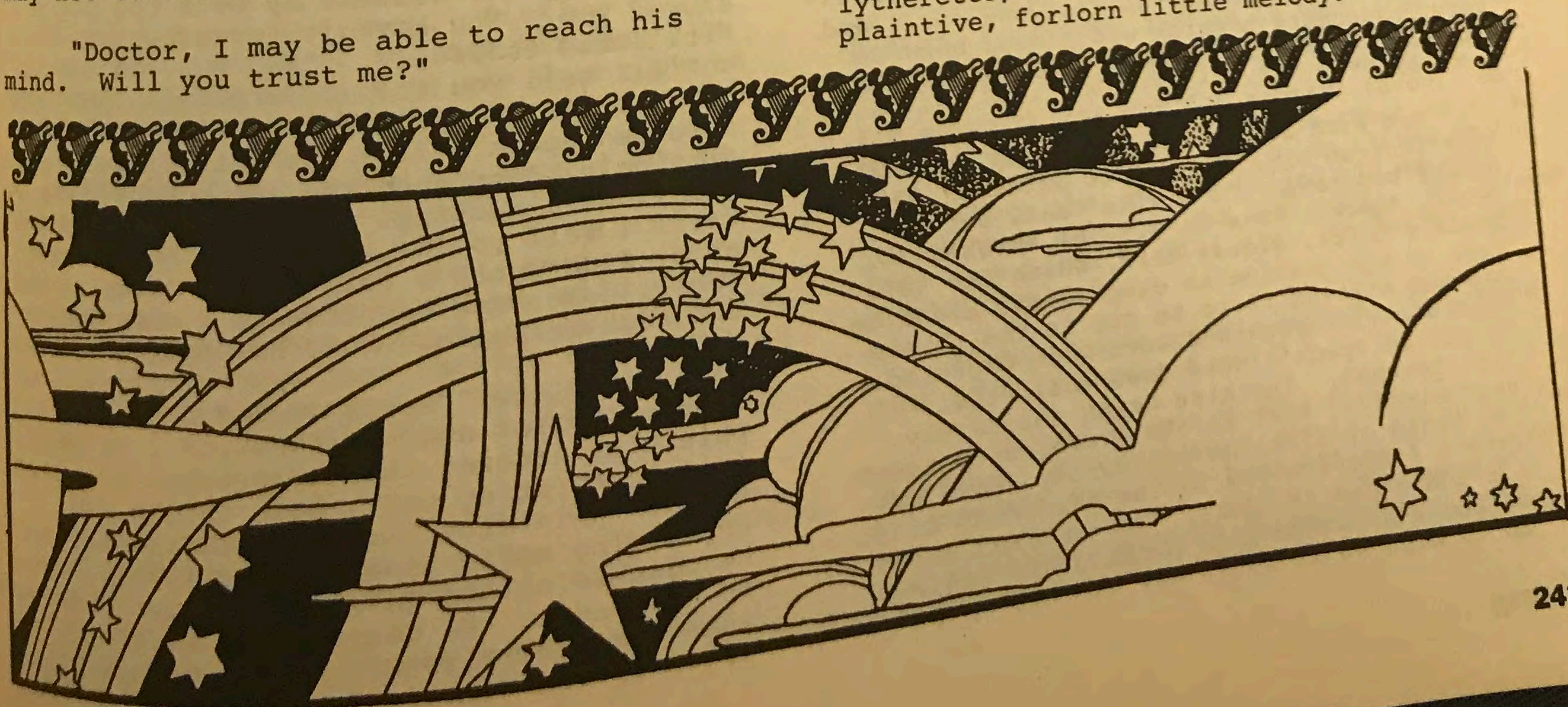
"Who did this to you, Jim?" McCoy asked.

"Don't know...never seen them before... got to sleep now...so tired." His eyes closed slowly.

McCoy checked the indicators once more, sighed deeply, and turned to find Spock standing in the shadows a few meters away, watching Kirk silently. "Go back to the cabin, Spock," he ordered, "I'll let you know if there is any change in his condition." Spock nodded, slowly turned, and left.

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The VENGEANCE moved silently toward Earth, through the emptiness of space. While on his bed Kirk's slave sat, holding the lytherette, stroking from its strings a plaintive, forlorn little melody.



PART II

Spock strode determinedly down the worn, gray corridor, looking neither to the right nor the left, ignoring crewmen's stares, with his Vulcan harp clutched firmly under one arm. Entering Sickbay as quietly and swiftly as an aging sliding door would allow, he tried to slip inside, past McCoy's office before he could be noticed and possibly stopped. He had gone no more than three steps, when a clear, ringing voice stopped him dead in his tracks, hitting him with all the agony, shame, indecision and loneliness of the last five days. Waiting... locked in Kirk's cabin...waiting for some word...not wanting to accept the unavoidable truth...after Kirk was beaten and left to die in the back streets of Rigel IV.

"McCoy, where are you? When are you going to let me out of this bed? I want to see Spock!"

At that moment, Spock leaped to the doorway, shrugging off McCoy's clutching fingers, and stood there, unable to speak.

"Spock, you can't come in now. You..." McCoy began authoritatively, and was thoroughly ignored, as Kirk raised both arms delightedly: "Spock!"

In one liquid movement, Spock was seated on the edge of the bed, with Kirk's arms around his shoulders, drinking in the pale, bruised face, the bandaged head, the glowing eyes, and the unrestrained welcome. In a few moments he had regained enough control to pull gently away from Kirk's embrace. A green flush of shame suffused his face. "How can I allow this man to do this to me--destroy my control so easily--and how avoid it?" he thought. But, "Captain," was all he could say. He wanted to rise, put distance between himself and Kirk, but Kirk was clutching his hand tightly. And his eyes--such incredible eyes, glowing and very moist--were riveted on Spock. As if from a very great distance, he heard Kirk ask McCoy to leave them alone in such a convincing tone, that McCoy left without another word.

Remembering the harp under his arm, Spock found enough presence of mind to transfer it into his hands, so that one small and very inadequate barrier was placed between himself and Kirk. "I have come to play for you, sir."

But Kirk reached for the harp, gently took it from him, and set it aside on a nearby bedstand. "I'd like that, but... later, Spock. Come here." He stroked Spock's thick, glossy hair, which now fell free to his jawline in deep waves, since he had not allowed it to be cut in the severe Vulcan style Spock had worn when captured. He pulled Spock's head down until their lips touched. The kiss began delicately, searchingly. Lost in the sweet, warm touch and taste of Kirk, he was hardly aware as Kirk's fingers moved to the fastening of his tunic and trousers. Kirk sucked hard on Spock's tongue and, pushing his tunic up as high as it would go, ran his hands

hard over the furry chest, squeezing, rolling, brushing against the hard, green nipples repeatedly. Spock tried to support his weight on his hands to avoid Kirk's recently fractured arms and ribs, but it was hard to concentrate. He felt faint from the suddenness and intensity of his arousal. His body was on fire, licked with flames. He gasped with relief when Kirk finally yanked his trousers part way down, easing the pain in his groin, letting his cock spring free, searching for Kirk. And he gasped again as Kirk's hand closed over it hard, possessively, and he thrust his tongue deep into Spock's ear.

Suddenly, Kirk's hands moved to his shoulders, pushing him away. Kirk fell back into his pillows with a contented sigh. His eyes languidly traveled over Spock's disheveled clothes and half-naked body. He licked his lips, and smiled arrogantly, suggestively. Spock flushed helplessly, and tried to rearrange his clothes.

"No. Leave it. I like to look at you this way." He reached forward to trap Spock's hands, bringing them down to his crotch, pressing them there, against his hard, blanket-covered cock. Then he reached upward to pull Spock's tunic higher again, letting his fingers drift over nipples and down chest, to play in the dark fur on Spock's stomach. "You know, I've thought of you constantly in the last few days. Ever since I was conscious." Spock blinked back a sudden, poignant feeling. His eyes were drawn again to Kirk's when a sudden, demanding hand brushed his lips, cupping his chin and cheek. There was an avid, hard glitter to Kirk's smile now. "Yes, I've thought constantly about what I want to do to you.... McCoy could walk in here any minute now, you know, or one of the attendants. But you are going to kneel down by the side of the bed, and suck me until I come in your mouth. Come on; kneel down now." Kirk coaxed, gently pushing and urging, until Spock slid off the edge of the bed, to the floor. Kirk rolled to the edge of the bed, lay on his side and waited, smiling gently at Spock. "I want you to suck me very slowly; then when I start to come, you'll stop me, squeeze my cock the way I showed you. You haven't forgotten how?" Kirk asked teasingly. "And you won't stop until I tell you to. Understand? And when McCoy comes in, you'll keep sucking," he caressed Spock's face with his fingertips, pityingly, "and when the attendants come in, you'll keep sucking. And you won't get up until I tell you to. You will kneel here at my side until I tell you to leave. And you'll come back tomorrow if I want you, and suck me again. Now, how do you answer?"

"Yes, sir," Spock choked out, in a kind of horror and apprehension. He was so painfully aroused that he pressed his hard, full-to-bursting cock, bare thighs and stomach painfully hard against the icy cold, unyielding metal side of the Sickbay bed as he reached out to take the heavy, golden cock in his mouth. He desperately wanted to do something to relieve the pain of his own arousal, but Kirk refused him, urging his

hands instead to stroke Kirk's thighs and chest, and to fondle his soft, heavy balls until they grew tight and hard.

He became very afraid, as he sucked softly, slowly, that McCoy would walk in, or worse yet, one of the young nurses. His uncontrolled imagination supplied a crowd of jeering orderlies, standing at the door, watching and laughing. He strained to listen for any sound beyond that closed door--a sound-proofed door--but all his senses were dulled by the extremity of his arousal. Paradoxically, as his fear of discovery increased, so did his arousal. But Kirk, increasing his own pleasure and Spock's movements, would not let him suck too hard or fast. He shuddered helplessly. Several times Kirk seemed about to lose control, then he would have Spock apply quick pressure to his cock, to subdue it--and then he would have Spock start all over again. It seemed to Spock's distorted time sense to last for hours. Finally, Kirk could wait no longer. He held Spock's head steady in both his hands, and fucked his face with abandon, pushing his cock hard and fast as far down Spock's throat as he could, not caring about any discomfort he caused. After what seemed a very long time, he held Spock's wet face firmly against him while his cock spurted directly down Spock's throat, and he shuddered and cried out.

Afterwards, he lay there exhausted, stroking Spock's face with his fingertips again, his cock still nestled in Spock's mouth. "That was very nice. My dear love-slave. Now you can just stay there on your knees, and keep me nice and warm in your hot mouth while I rest."

But Kirk fell asleep almost immediately, and Spock pulled away. He wanted nothing more than to rest his head on the edge of the bed until he regained control of himself, until the pain and shock left him, but he knew he dare not. He staggered to his feet and stood swaying as he straightened his tunic, pulled his trousers up, and tried to fasten them, a hopeless task as yet.

At that moment the door slid open. An orderly entered, carrying Kirk's supper on a tray. Instantly, Spock turned to the wall. His eyes fell on the harp. Picking it up quickly, clutching it against his body, he practically leaped back to the door just as McCoy entered, blocking his way.

"He is sleeping now and should not be disturbed," Spock hissed softly. "I will be returning to the cabin now." He stared at McCoy, and McCoy stared back, noting his rumpled hair, and the strained, wild expression. Motioning the orderly to follow, McCoy reluctantly turned back through the door--but not before glancing at the peacefully sleeping Kirk, and the life function indicators above the bed.

Spock moved swiftly to the outer door, intent upon escape. When McCoy's voice called out to him, he stopped but did not turn.

"Just a minute, Spock. I want to talk to you!"

"Not now, Doctor, I cannot." He could not completely conceal the trembling in his voice. He hardly noticed how blurred his vision had become, how wet his face.

"All right, Spock. All right. You don't have to talk to me now if you don't want to. But I don't want you back here, understand? I don't want you to see Jim again. Not until I've talked to you. And, you are to stay in his cabin and not leave it. Tomorrow, we talk. You've got some explaining to do!"

"Yes, Doctor." He did not really know or care what McCoy was talking about; he just wanted to leave. In two long steps he was out of Sickbay.

By the time he had reached Kirk's cabin, he had begun to think more clearly--and knew he didn't want to start thinking yet. He stood at the door in aversion for several minutes; it was the last place in the universe he wanted to be just then, but he had no choice. There was no place else for him to go. After he showered, he prepared himself for meditation, and spent the night in a deep trance. By the next day, he had regained control, and was prepared for McCoy's visit.

He came straight to the point: "I want to know just what you did to Jim to bring him out of that coma after we beamed up from Rigel IV."

Spock had been prepared to answer this question with a partial truth ever since that day. "Some of my race are able to help those afflicted as the Captain was, by a kind of tactile hypnotism we can use. I used it to help...pull the Captain's awareness up from the darkness. I couldn't have done it if he were not so strong-willed, and did not himself fight so hard to return."

"That's all there is to it?" McCoy was skeptical, and still suspicious.

"Yes, Doctor. It is a simple thing, really, of limited usefulness."

"I see. I was...concerned about the effect on Jim. Thought it was some kind of telepathic mind-probe or something. Jim can be a stubborn, hot-headed, impulsive, selfish bastard sometimes, but he is very dear to me, a loyal friend. I'm very grateful to you for finding him, and bringing him back to us. And I'm going to ask you for another favor. He doesn't want me to tell anyone about this, so keep your mouth shut, hear? He thinks that those thugs that nearly killed him weren't just having a little fun and games. He thinks they were hired to kill him. He thinks they may try again."

"I don't understand, Doctor. Who would want to kill him, and why?"

"A lot of people might, Spock. In Starfleet, grudge fights, duels, and promotion by assassination have been strictly forbidden and are punishable by death. They were all too common for a short while--until it was discovered how much they weaken us. But

there are still plenty of clandestine attempts, almost always done by hirelings. Scotty is trustworthy; he's more interested in his engines than in being Captain. But there are all the other officers. Even an ensign might see some advantage to it, or simply want revenge for something or other. Then there are the other ships' captains. Kirk is not the only captain in the fleet who wants to rise to Fleet Captain, but he's probably the likeliest candidate--a real obstacle to other ambitious captains. With him permanently out of the competition, they'd be much likelier to win all that power and influence for themselves. But that is not the end of it. Then there are the cartels. Jim has his supporters in the Presidium Council, but some cartel, or entire bloc of "anonymous societies", may have another candidate they favor, someone already under their thumb completely. And, they might easily pay assassins to make sure Kirk can't spoil their plans."

"Doctor, I don't completely understand everything you are telling me. What are these cartels?" Political science was a subject that he had unaccountably neglected in his studies, Spock realized; he would remedy the omission as soon as possible.

"The cartels run Earth and the few remaining colonies, Spock. Representatives of the various cartels are the Directors of the Presidium Council, and the Council controls the government. Is the government."

"The Captain once mentioned that the citizens were responsible for electing the Executive President and other officials."

"Yes, but all the candidates are corporation men, so they can't lose. There is an uneasy balance of power between the cartels. The money, resources, and power are all in their hands. They control everything. Without backing from a bloc of corporations, you can't hold a public office. But that's all beside the point," McCoy said impatiently. "Jim is still in danger. There may be several crewmen on this ship now who have been promised a promotion and reward for Jim's death. I want to keep him in Sickbay, but I can't much longer. He won't be in any condition to fight for his life for awhile yet. He doesn't want to 'show weakness to the crew', as he calls it, by having Security guards follow him around constantly, and anyway, they might be in the pay of the assassin. So, I want you to watch him, Spock, all the time. I know that he'll do almost anything for you that you ask him, so ask to accompany him everywhere. Be alert all the time. Don't leave him alone, ever. I think I can trust you, Spock, and you're my only hope. I only hope it's enough; I can't even give you a weapon for protection.... Will you at least try?"

"I...will try, Doctor." (He added silently: "But who will protect me from him?") "When will you release him from Sickbay?"

"Well, not for several days at least, maybe a week, and I don't want him to return to duty for longer than that--at least two weeks."

"I think it would be advisable if you keep him in Sickbay as long as possible, and

not allow him visitors unless several orderlies or yourself are present in the room at the same time to guard him."

"Oh, I'll definitely do what I can to keep him there, but he can override me, you know, and leave whenever he wants. He trusts me, but he's stubborn and won't listen to reason when he really wants something." McCoy paused to pour himself a glass of brandy. "By the way, he said he wants to see you again, today. Soon."

Spock rose swiftly, moving away from McCoy, controlling his face with an effort of will. "Doctor, I want a favor from you in return for my cooperation. I...cannot return to the Captain in Sickbay. Will you make some excuse for me? Can you tell him that you have ordered me not to visit him again?"

"I don't know if I can do that, Spock! Is something the matter?"

"I cannot, I will not return there," murmured Spock after a long pause.

"Look, Spock. You're his property, bought and paid for. If he wants you, you'll have to go. I can only influence him up to a point, and where you are concerned he's hardly reasonable--or even rational sometimes. He can have Security carry you to him in Sickbay, if he wants to. Is it worth the humiliation? You'll have to go to him." McCoy rose, heading for the door, then paused, sighing deeply. "Well, I'll do what I can for you, and probably put my head on the block in the process. What good will it do anyway? He'll just want to leave Sickbay sooner to come here to you."

Three days later, a time Spock spent mostly in deep meditation, the door slid open to admit Kirk. He stood just inside the door, eyes immediately seeking out his Vulcan slave.

"Spock," he said softly.

Gradually coming out of his trance, his eyes slowly meeting Kirk's, he said tranquilly, remotely, "Captain."

Kirk paused, but Spock said nothing further, merely rising from his chair to stand with hands folded behind his back, continuing to meet Kirk's eyes serenely. He remained unperturbed when Kirk quickly walked up to him, and took hold of both his arms.

"You've lost weight! You haven't been eating, have you?"

"Yes, sir."

Kirk looked at him speculatively, considering that ambiguity. "Well, no matter. I arranged for a meal to be brought to us here."

In a moment, several yeomen arrived, bearing quite a lavish meal, with many fruit and vegetable dishes, and several meat dishes for Kirk. Spock sat composedly,

exhibiting no interest in the food, but that affected Kirk not at all. He simply gave several dishes a small shove in Spock's direction, or merely pointed, ordering, "Eat, Spock," and monitoring his intake all through the meal, making sure that it was more than adequate. Spock acquiesced unenthusiastically, but without protest. Neither of them seemed inclined to speak throughout the meal.

As the yeomen removed the remains of the meal, McCoy arrived. "Jim, I've come to check up on you! You did promise to spend the next few days in bed, you remember." He greeted Spock silently with a nod, which was returned.

"Yes, but only if you fulfill your end of the bargain, and give me a light rundown on ship's status and our position."

"All right," McCoy sighed. "Scotty says everything is fine with the ship. No problems except the usual erratic performance of the worn parts in the warp-drive control components. But he's managing. The Invincible thought they detected Romulans at the extreme limits of sensor-range, so we're using our light and sensor shields, and conserving power by traveling at just Warp 2, in a very round-about route--dammit! I'm not sure when we'll reach Earth at this rate. I was looking forward to getting home!"

"So was I, Bones, so was I! Well, one advantage. I should be completely recovered by then." He rose to get three glasses and a bottle of Saurian brandy. "How about a nightcap?" McCoy nodded as he handed a glass to him, and one to Spock, saying, "Drink it."

McCoy rolled the brandy around on his tongue appreciatively while covertly glancing at Spock. "You should be completely recovered--IF you spend your time in bed taking it easy. I'll come by to check you out tomorrow."

Kirk laughed. "All right! I'll do everything you tell me to." He paused, his eyes wandering to his slave. "Spock, go to bed now and wait for me there." He turned to McCoy, holding up the bottle inquisitively: "Want another one?"

McCoy rose rather abruptly, looking uncomfortably at Spock's stiff back, departing into the night cabin. "No, and you had better not have another either. I have to go now anyway. Duty calls. Ensign Cooper has a hangnail. ...Uh, take it easy, will you?"

Kirk took his time clearing away the glasses and taking a leisurely shower. He sat for almost an hour, daydreaming and listening to some of his favorite music. Finally, turning the cabin lights down and pulling off his robe, he moved to the bed.

Spock lay, partially propped up on his pillow, eyes half closed, in light meditation. As Kirk's knee touched the bed, his eyes met and focused on Kirk's tranquilly. Kirk paused, looking down at him, suffused by a feeling akin to wonder.

His dark hair framed the sculptured planes of his narrow face softly, elegant eartips parting the shining waves. On both sides of his face the commas of midnight curls outlined his cheekbones. His lips were moist and slightly parted, showing the tender green of the inner lip. His eyes were soft, dark and mysterious as the depths of space, brows rising swift and dark above them, like a swallow's wings. "He looks so beautiful," thought Kirk, "exotic, vulnerable, sensuous, and altogether desirable."

Kirk sat on the bed, resting his back against his pillow and headboard, and carefully slid an arm around Spock, pulling him up slightly, next to Kirk, his head on Kirk's shoulder. He loved the feel of Spock's skin, lightly stroking his face, his tender throat, the delicate hollows of neck and collarbone, his shoulders, and the silken inside surfaces of his arms. Spock remained passive, his calm gaze locked on Kirk, and Kirk's eyes seldom left his. He did not object to the passiveness of the body that totally belonged to him now; he took his tactile, sensual pleasure in petting it, manipulating it, using it as he wished, without resistance, knowing that Spock was aware he was doing so, and could feel everything whether or not he allowed himself to be affected by it. Kirk knew he could do as he wished with Spock, whenever he wished--and knew that Spock understood that, too. It was an incredibly erotic experience, Kirk decided, as he raised and spread Spock's unresisting legs wide, stroking his fingertips lightly down both thighs, his eyes never leaving Spock's. He lifted both legs over his shoulders, covered both hands thickly with a slippery cream and, gazing deeply into Spock's eyes, manipulated the soft genitals and inner thighs. Applying the cream copiously, he slid the soft cock repeatedly through both hands, stroked and squeezed the balls gently.

Leaning forward, he exposed Spock's lean, well-shaped buttocks, straining towards him, and the pale green crevice separating them. Using yet more cream, he massaged the sensitive flesh thoroughly, drawing two fingers along the crevice repeatedly, gradually concentrating all his attention on the soft depression within. His eyes looked deep into Spock's as he played with the soft cock with one hand, and with the other delicately rimmed the ultrasensitive anus, dipping his fingers in a little deeper each time.

It seemed to Kirk that Spock's flesh felt somehow hotter than before, but there was no change in his face, and it didn't matter anyway, because he was not concerned with winning Spock's response. He dipped two fingers deep within Spock, feeling the buttery-soft tissues cling, then give way before him. His loveslave was altogether pleasing to his touch, and so he coated his hand with the rest of the cream, and reached up deep inside Spock, feeling the small, hard organ, the prostate gland, through the thin wall of soft tissue, stroking it repeatedly with three fingers, adding a fourth finger, and again manipulating the elusive organ within. He thought he heard a whimper deep within Spock's

throat, but decided he must be mistaken. He did not really want this strange, virginal creature to react to his touch anyway; it might spoil the illusion.

Still, he wanted more of Spock, somehow, than he had now; he wanted all of Spock. He longed to reach the center of Spock's being, to experience his vital force, to seek out, and find, his essence, his soul.

Spock was soft, hot, liquid to his touch. There was an odd pulsing deep inside him that urged Kirk on. He slowly pulled his fingers out again, then replaced them, easily adding a thumb, stroking against the buttery walls, feeling the hard gland buried within swelling larger. He looked up at Spock again, drawn by the distinct sound of a whimper, to see his lips part, his eyes unfocused and partly closed. Continuing to stroke the hot, still soft cock, he worked his fingers deeper into Spock. His hand was buried palm-deep now, his own cock pressed hard against Spock's thigh. A sudden writhing shudder gripped Spock's entire body, and his hand slipped in, past the tight muscle-ring, all the way to the wrist. Now the way was easier. He carefully slid his hand still deeper within Spock, stretching taut the sides of the sensitive channel, following the turns of the pathway inside Spock's body, filling him full. He stroked and pressed firmly, unrelentingly, against the hot, living flesh, the organs of life, feeling them respond to his presence and move against his hand caressingly.

He pulled his hand part way out again, drawing a long groan from Spock. To Kirk, his face suddenly seemed to be transfigured with ecstasy; he had never before seen such a look on any creature's face. He moved his hand gently even further within, then back out again, part way past the elastic, clutching rim. Spock threw his head back and groaned ecstatically. As he slid his hand back up inside Spock the third time, Kirk carefully curled his fingers into a fist for even greater stimulation. As he pushed forward, a sudden wave of heat rose from Spock's body, and he shuddered all over, arching his back, lifting his hips, pushing against Kirk's invading hand. Kirk carefully increased the speed and depth his hand moved, watching Spock's face, innocence lost now, a satyr in heat, crying out pleadingly, wordlessly, rotating his hips against Kirk.

Not even caring now about his loss of control, his defeat at Kirk's hands, Spock was fiercely stimulated but could not find completion. His cock still lay limp in Kirk's hand, but the other hand moved deep inside him, possessing him, searching out his soul. He felt stretched to the breaking point, filled to the brim. It was beyond all experience; he could not stop crying out.

Kirk himself was desperately aroused, craving release, wanting to be within Spock, all of him. He reached even further into Spock, but that did not satisfy him. He pulled his hand out half way, so that the tight muscle-ring clutched his palm,

and slid his own cock into his hand. Wrapping his fingers tightly around his cock, he again pushed up into Spock as far as he could. First slowly, then faster, he stroked and squeezed his cock inside Spock's body, moving his hand relentlessly in and out of Spock's body, tormenting already overstimulated nerves deliciously. Spock responded by trying to open himself even further, and move against Kirk's hand, frenziedly wishing it were possible to turn himself inside out, so that every hidden part of himself could be touched by Kirk. Kirk's hand, resting loosely, forgotten, on the green-flushed cock, felt the sudden rock-hardness, and automatically responded by grasping harder, for Kirk was beyond rational thought at that point.

Spock heard his cry and felt the hot flood spurt within him in intense frustration, fearing Kirk, having taken his own pleasure, would withdraw now, and leave him like this.

"PLEASE, Jim! Oh, please! Fuck me! Help me...."

Startled away from the afterglow of his own pleasure, Kirk looked down at his loveslave. Without warning, he eased his fist far inside Spock again, carefully turning and twisting it, then pulled out almost all the way, then in again, rotating it as hard as he dared in Spock's burning hot, pulsing, liquid insides. He felt the hard cock pulsing in his other, tightly clenched hand, and repeated the penetration one final time, then pulling his entire fist past the tender, swollen prostate, and out past the tightly clenched ring of muscle.

Spock screamed out his ecstasy, his whole body convulsing, his cock spurting out in great, liquid pulses. Kirk's mouth instantly closed over the head of his cock, to catch every burning drop. As Spock lay back, limp with exhaustion and satiation, Kirk's mouth closed over his, releasing a precious libation into his mouth, letting Spock drink the richness of his own semen.

Some indefinite time later, Spock came to semiconsciousness as his legs were again spread wide and lifted. He flinched helplessly as Kirk's fingers probed his sore, tender tissues, to make sure he had not been injured. A warm, wet cloth caressingly wiped away the stickiness of the remnants of the lotion, the few drops of blood, semen, and natural lubricant. He felt soft lips briefly brush his cock and the very tender area beneath, then, after a moment's pause, he was gently gathered up into Kirk's arms to lie against the broad chest.

Much later, he awoke to find himself still in Kirk's arms, the teasing fingers playing with his hair, the golden eyes smiling as they watched him awaken. Kirk shifted, wrapping his arms around Spock, running his hands down Spock's back to squeeze his muscular ass. Unable to control his reactions, Spock flinched.

"Still too sore to play?" Kirk smiled challengingly. "Then how about a shower?" Kirk urged Spock out of bed, pulling him into the shower with him. He set the controls for the luxury of a water shower, making sure it was very warm. He squeezed a large quantity of liquid soap into both hands, and moved them caressingly over Spock's head and body, down to the feet and up both legs to the genitals, taking his time. When he finished, he indicated Spock should reciprocate.

Reluctantly, Spock began, but soon became very absorbed in his task, unable to deny the sensuousness of his hands sliding over the smooth, slippery curves of Kirk's body. Feeling the beginnings of arousal, Kirk pulled away from him. Rinsing for a moment longer, Kirk reached one hand behind Spock's head giving him one hard kiss, then pulled him along out of the shower. After drying each other briskly, he handed Spock a robe and put one on himself.

"I promised McCoy I'd spend the next few days at least in bed," Kirk sighed. "I guess it won't be so bad with you there to keep me company. But first, we eat."

Yeomen arrived bearing food and drink for them, and also fresh bed linen. All too aware that the odor and traces of their love-making must be very obvious to the young woman tidying Kirk's night cabin, Spock sat silently, and again had to be urged to eat. Annoyed, Kirk looked speculatively at him, finally divining the reason for his discomfort.

"You'll just have to get used to it, you know. There is no reason to be disturbed. They all know what you are. You'll have to learn to accept it as they do."

But Spock knew he could never accept it. On Rigel IV he had made his choice not to escape, making inevitable his status as slave by doing so. Since then, he had meditated for days, trying to restore his mental equilibrium, to form some defense against Kirk. He had resolved to follow Kirk's orders, to let Kirk manipulate him however he wished, and to stoically remain unaffected, untouched, even by pain or humiliation. And then, in spite of his efforts, he found that he was completely vulnerable to Kirk; he had no defenses, no control. He could not understand why Kirk had this power over him. He felt himself in danger of being torn apart by forces he did not understand, and he was afraid.

Finishing his final glass of wine, Kirk pulled him into the night cabin, and onto his bed. Indicating Spock's harp, he said: "Play for me."

Spock chose some simple pre-Reform Vulcan folk songs, occasionally interspersed with the more complex pieces of Vulcan's classical period, knowing that the more modern or experimental music would sound unpleasant to Human ears. He played, focusing all his attention on the music, oblivious to any outside distractions or inner musings. The afternoon passed peacefully in this fashion.

McCoy showed up again in the evening, checking to make sure that Kirk was indeed resting in bed, and they decided to share dinner together in Kirk's cabin. After he left, they played a few games of chess, then retired, Kirk holding Spock against himself possessively, but undemandingly. The next few days passed in much the same fashion, with Kirk becoming more and more restless at the inactivity. Even frequent lovemaking with Spock did not completely subdue his boredom.

Seeing his restlessness and wanting to forestall the inevitable, McCoy planned a little party for the Bridge crew and a few other officers, in the rec room the next evening. With Uhura's help, he planned an interesting meal to be accompanied only with light wine and a little music, hoping that the party would not be too tiring for Kirk. As often happens, however, the guest-list grew longer, the liquor got harder, the music led to dancing, and the party grew into a general celebration.

Mindful of McCoy's request, Spock tried to sit at Kirk's side and follow him closely all night, until the dancing began and it became plain that Kirk was trying to shake him off. He wanted to leave, but felt he had to stay. McCoy was nowhere in sight. So he stood, back against one bulkhead of the rec room, trying to keep watch on Kirk as he danced with a variety of attractive crewwomen from the Bridge, Sickbay, and Engineering departments, gradually concentrating his attentions on Uhura. He led her off the improvised dance floor to a small table in the shadows of the far corner, but Vulcan eyes had no trouble seeing their tête-à-tête and the occasional kisses they shared. When they finally rose and left together, Spock followed them, not stopping to wonder if it were McCoy's admonition or something else entirely that caused him to follow unhesitatingly.

Kirk seemed to expect him to follow, because he was waiting for him in the corridor, one arm tightly around Uhura, her head nestled on his shoulder. "Spock. Report to Dr. McCoy in Sickbay. Tell him I said you were to spend the night there. ...I'll see you tomorrow," he continued rather vaguely, eyes turning to Uhura with sensual promise.

They turned and walked away, leaving him standing there alone in the corridor. All the officers on the Vengeance, except Kirk, had to share their crowded quarters, Spock knew. He also knew without doubt why Kirk had wanted to be rid of him, and what entertainment he had planned for the rest of the night. A burning feeling suffused his face and body, and he didn't even try to control it. A vivid memory flashed through his mind of the last few hours on Rigel IV, how he had felt when Kirk was dancing with Sa-aa, and when he went with her to the back rooms at "Joy's", leaving him sitting there alone. He remembered watching Kirk's body sheathed in the sensuous red tunic, the illusion of flames licking at his body suggestively, writhing in the Orion dance. And he remembered what he had wanted then, how he had

wondered how it would feel to take Kirk then and feel his response, his surrender....

He closed his eyes, fighting for control.

There was nowhere else to go, so he proceeded to Sickbay. He was at first grateful to find McCoy's office empty, and settled himself in a chair to wait. But after several hours, McCoy still had not appeared. He began to pace up and down the office, trying to control, to keep his mind off what was now happening in Kirk's cabin, in the bed he shared with Kirk.

McCoy did not show up until ship's morning, looking somewhat the worse for wear, obviously nursing a hangover. "Well, what are you doing here?" he said querulously.

"I was ordered to spend the night in Sickbay, Doctor."

"Mmmmmph. So you just sat here. You could have used a bed. Well, who was it?... that Kirk spent the night with?"

"Lieutenant Uhura."

"I guess he's got a good chance of not waking up with a knife in his ribs, then. I'm glad he didn't try one of the newer men in the crew."

Spock looked at McCoy sharply. Neither of the possibilities to which McCoy alluded had occurred to him: that Kirk's life might have been in danger, or that he would seek out a relationship with another male. An invisible knife seemed to twist within him.

"He'll call you when he's slept it off. Why don't you go stretch out on my cot in the store room over there? No one will disturb you. I'm going to have to talk to him about using my Sickbay like a hotel," McCoy muttered crossly. "If he's going to keep this up, he might as well assign you a separate cabin of your own."

It wasn't until evening that Kirk called him to his cabin. When Spock arrived, his emotions under tight control, two yeomen were arranging a light supper on the table. He followed Kirk to the table, nonplussed by the look Kirk shot at him, seemingly composed of pain and resentment. He sat silently, his face drawn and tired, avoiding Spock's eyes. He pushed his food back and forth on his plate, hardly attempting to eat. Finally giving up even the pretense, he put his fork down, leaned back, and sighed.

"I'm very tired tonight, Spock. When you're finished eating, have the yeomen clear this up."

Spock watched him as he went into the bathroom; he had never seen Kirk in such a dispirited state, and could not fathom the reason. He, too, gave up the pretense of eating, and called the yeomen back as he had been ordered. When they left, he undressed, and lay down to wait for Kirk.

In a moment, Kirk returned, turned the cabin lights all the way off, and lay down

next to Spock, not touching him. In the pitch blackness, Spock could feel Kirk's eyes on him. He waited resignedly for Kirk's touch, but it never came. Kirk stirred restlessly, and turned several times, finally sitting up in the bed. Spock, not yet able to sleep himself, sat up beside him.

"Is there something wrong, sir?"

"I just can't sleep."

"Come lie back down again. I can help you sleep."

After Kirk settled back down again, Spock hesitantly reached out to touch him, running gentle fingers over his forehead, not attempting any sort of mind contact, but merely projecting a feeling of calm.

Kirk sighed profoundly under the soothing touch. "That feels so good, Spock." Gradually his breathing became slow and regular. Spock carefully withdrew his hands and settled back in the pillows, still looking at Kirk though it was too dark even for Vulcan eyes.

Sleep was elusive. He felt oddly bereft. Deciding to analyze the emotion before dismissing it, he was shamed to acknowledge that he could be disappointed that Kirk had not touched him tonight, had not wanted him. He badly wanted to reach out to Kirk, to touch him, but he denied himself. Unbidden, all his resentment of Kirk's involvement with Uhura and Sa-aa slipped past his control. He wondered if Kirk eventually would lose all interest in him, then tried to convince himself that he didn't care, shouldn't care, could control his emotions. When Kirk lost interest in him, would he sell Spock to someone else? Spock knew that, regardless of conditions or circumstances, he would not allow himself to be another's slave; he would die first by his own hand or go into a deep trance and never come out. Not completely aware of what he was doing, his hand reached out to touch Kirk's outstretched hand, his fingers crept carefully into Kirk's palm and nestled there. The sleeping Kirk's fingers curled over Spock's fingers snugly.

And what if Kirk should set him free, perhaps even return him to Vulcan? He had to be honest with himself: he did not want to return. There was nothing for him on Vulcan. Nothing and no one. When he was there, he had wanted nothing but his freedom. Freedom from a people who would never accept him, who preached IDIC and knew it not. Freedom from what he had come to recognize as a rigid, sterile, limited ideology, and a culture bound by its ancient traditions, and bound to its planet by fear of discovery. Freedom from his father's authority and control, and an arranged marriage which he knew was necessary but, perhaps illogically, didn't want.

But where could he go? He had no home, no ties, except the ones he did not want, on Vulcan. He only knew what he wanted. Though it went against his training and all tradition, it was illogical and dishonest not to admit to himself what was becoming increasingly clearer to him with each passing day: he wanted Kirk.

There was such a tangle of emotion within him concerning Kirk, that he wished he could control it, drive it away, destroy it with logic, as any Vulcan should be able to do. But he was caught in the tangle, somehow caught by Kirk himself, and he did not understand. It fogged his mind with confusion and fear, and made it impossible for him to control. Although, after successfully completing his Kahs-wan, he had begun to rebel against the sterile precepts and indoctrination of Vulcan, refusing to completely bury his emotions, as was required of him, he now found that he could not completely abandon the Vulcan way of life of control, logic, and meditation. He had not thought it would be so difficult to accept, or at least understand, emotions in himself and in others, but they were so much more complex than any problem of logic.

As his eyelids finally grew heavy with sleep, he wondered wistfully if Svitik's theorem of parallel universes might be true, and if perhaps in one of these universes there might be another Kirk and Spock, respected and loved, who traveled together through the stars, living and working together as equals.

When he awoke it was ship's morning, and the cabin lights had automatically gone on at their lowest setting. His eyes opened to look directly into Kirk's gentle, sensuous green-gold gaze.

"Ah, could my eyes behold thee every morning, contented would my heart...."

At Spock's raised eyebrows, Kirk smiled crookedly and explained, "It's from an ancient song."

Gently stroking Spock's hair back from his face, he gazed seriously into Spock's eyes. "Spock, I'm bored out of my mind. McCoy or no, I've got to do something besides lie in bed--as pleasant as that is with you. So, I've decided to conduct a surprise inspection of the ship tomorrow. It should only take a few hours, and McCoy can come along to keep an eye on me, to make sure I don't overtire myself. That should put a stop to some of his grumbling, don't you think?"

"There is only a 5.38% probability of that eventuality, sir, no higher."

"Hah, hahah! Well, you're probably right, but I'm not going to let his grumbling stop me!"

"Sir, I would enjoy going with you."

"Why not? Sorry I didn't stop to think that you aren't getting the exercise you're used to, either. How would you like to go to the gym after the inspection tour?"

"Yes, sir, but will you be returning here afterwards?"

Kirk sighed. "Well, I can't go to the gym with you. And I suspect that McCoy will want to give me a thorough going-over, partly because of his mother-hen instincts--and partly for revenge because I disobeyed his medical orders. So, I'll probably be in Sickbay."

Later that day Kirk called McCoy to his cabin to explain his plan. McCoy did indeed grumble, but finally concurred, thinking to himself that at least it would probably do him--and Spock--less harm than his party had.

Before they left the following morning, McCoy checked Kirk with his mediscanner and reluctantly gave his OK to proceed. Predictably, Kirk's first stop was the Bridge. He bounced out of the turbolift, trailed by the watchful Spock and McCoy, to be greeted eagerly by Mr. Scott, who was anticipating an early return to his beloved, but troublesome, engines. He spoke to each of the Bridge crew separately, getting a thorough report on the status of each station. He was cheered to learn from Mr. Scott that they were now proceeding directly to Earth at optimum warp speed, and were scheduled to arrive in three weeks. To McCoy's annoyance, Kirk spent almost two hours on the Bridge, finally carrying away with him several microtapes of reports and communications to review later in his cabin.

Kirk moved tirelessly through the ship, speaking to as many crewmen as possible, taking as much time as possible, only taking a break for lunch at McCoy's insistence. Spock resolutely kept his eyes off Kirk; instead he unobtrusively observed the crewmen for any signs of hostility. He could see that they all seemed glad to see their Captain. Especially for a privateership crew, they all were apparently loyal, and had considerable rapport with Kirk and with each other. Although he began to believe that McCoy had overstated the danger, he did not relax his vigilance.

McCoy was thoroughly annoyed at Kirk for taking so much longer on this inspection than he had promised. It seemed to him that Kirk was inviting an attack by his behavior. Kirk actually seemed disappointed that as yet nothing had happened. From time to time he pulled out his mediscanner and waved it at Kirk, who responded with a harrassed, long-suffering look. By the time they reached their last stop, Engineering, Kirk was still showing no signs of slowing down. But McCoy himself was tired, and knew that Kirk certainly must be.

Spock stood, discreetly trying to ignore the worshipful, admiring look which Lt. Tournau, Scotty's second-in-command in Engineering, bestowed on Kirk as he earnestly described the problems caused by the worn and obsolete, practically irreplaceable components in the drive. He gradually became aware of another crewman who seemed very interested, too. He reached out with his mind, and detected a faint trace of negative purpose and ill-will. As the man started moving quietly towards them, his hand rose casually to chest level. Something black glinted through his fingers. With a silent, graceful step, Spock interposed himself between the crewman and Kirk, one hand snaking upwards to pinch the nerve in the man's neck, the other hand closing over the man's wrist with numbing force, pushing the weaponed hand downwards and away. The whole operation was conducted so smoothly, silently, and unobtrusively that, although both McCoy and Kirk were faced in his direction, neither

noticed anything was amiss for several long moments, until Spock lowered the unconscious crewman to the deck. He immediately prized the small, black, elongated ellipsoid out of the crewman's hand, and examined it cautiously, a great feeling of anger rising in his throat, choking him into silence.

McCoy dropped to his knees beside Spock. "A capsule-gun! My God! Did he get a shot at Jim? If there's any possibility...." He took it from Spock, immediately locking shut a tiny switch on one side, and twisting it apart at a band that ran around its center. "It seems to be fully charged and shows no sign of being fired recently. Thank God! But it doesn't matter; you're coming with me to Sickbay right now, Jim."

Ignoring him, Kirk crouched down beside the crewman, his hand finding the reassuringly steady pulse, and looked at him sadly. "His name is Garrovick; I know his father. He's been serving with us on the Vengeance almost a year now. He's a good crewman. I wonder why...." Sighing regretfully, Kirk rose to his feet to tell the shocked Lt. Tournau to call Security to put Garrovick in the brig.

As they walked to Sickbay, McCoy on his left, Spock close to his right side, Kirk mused sadly on the fate of Garrovick. He would have to be interrogated, arrested, court-martialed, returned to Earth in shame, and probably not allowed to leave ever again. His career, possibly his life, would be ruined.

"Bones, I have to go see Garrovick, talk to him, find out why. Maybe I can do something for him."

"He just tried to kill you, and you want to help him?! If it hadn't been for Spock,...if he had gotten just one shot at you and hit any part of your body...well, it would only have taken one of those little capsules. They penetrate instantly, leaving no trace. The virulol in them--yes, it is definitely virulol, Jim, I checked--kills in three seconds flat. There's no known antidote." But McCoy gave up the effort; he could see that Kirk had already made up his mind. "At least make sure that he's searched thoroughly beforehand, Jim."

"Of course I will. ...Spock?"

"Sir."

"That makes twice now."

"Sir?"

"That you've saved my life!"

"Sir." Tonelessly.

Entering the turbolift, Kirk turned to study Spock's face, discerning the tension there, and with a flash of insight interpreted it correctly as concern for Kirk's own welfare, and anger at the threat to it. He grasped Spock's hand hard, out of McCoy's sight in deference to Spock's reticence, and said softly, encouragingly, "We're both OK now. Why don't you have a go at the gym while McCoy

looks me over? You need to work off some tension. We can talk later, in the cabin."

"Permission to accompany you to Sickbay, sir? Then I will go to the gym, as you suggest."

Kirk smiled understandingly, and nodded his permission.

When Spock returned from the gym, Kirk was lying back on his bed, eyes closed, one hand on his forehead, obviously nursing a headache. Kirk smiled up at him as he sat on the edge of the bed. Spock's fingertips gently stroked Kirk's forehead, drawing the headache away, and he sighed blissfully, relaxing completely. Gently, Spock urged Kirk over on his stomach. He carefully stroked his long fingers through Kirk's soft hair, massaging his scalp and the back of his neck, then moving down to his shoulders and back, squeezing and massaging soothingly. In moments, Kirk fell deeply asleep, but the sensuousness of Kirk's perfect silken skin encouraged Spock to keep stroking a little longer, moving down to caress the pale golden, deliciously smooth, velvety skin on the perfect, prominent buttocks, and explore the enticing dimples on both.

The beginnings of arousal finally caused him to pull away from Kirk reluctantly, regretfully, and arise from the bed. He spent some time in meditation, only partly successful in quelling the restlessness in his mind. Though it was still early, and neither he nor Kirk had yet eaten, he decided then to retire. There wasn't much room in the bed, since Kirk was lying in the middle, but he slipped in, taking care not to wake him. In spite of that Kirk stirred, more than half asleep, and reached out blindly until he found the warmth of Spock's body, put one arm over Spock's waist, and nestled his face and body against Spock, falling sound asleep once more. Spock lay still, enjoying the sensation, yet a painful bleakness filled him, preventing him from relaxing completely. After some minutes, he finally slept.

A feather touch of soft lips moving down his body slowly, woke him from a dream of gray desolation. Strong, warm arms held him safe, rescued him from the grim grayness, kept him from being pulled back into the dream. The warm lips covered every inch of his body, so gently. He was lost in a fine, sweet, luminous mist, not completely awake, nor did he wish to awaken. As the smooth body holding him slithered lower, the lips gradually centering on his pulsing need, he managed finally to move his fingertips, finding a silky, tousled head, and gently cradled it in his fingers. He became aware of a faint, but powerful mind-touch, a sweet, poignant, longing, giving emotion. It drove away the last of his dream-shadows and made him want more, but his fingers did not have the strength to search out the precise meld-points. Slowly, so slowly, gentle lips found the center of his longing, closed over it, and slowly drew his need from him and his strength, sending him falling deliciously into a fulfilled, dreamless sleep.

He could never be quite sure afterwards, and really did not want to know, just how



much was dream, and how much reality. The experience had affected him very deeply, although he could not have explained why. He cherished it in a hidden, guarded part of his mind, to sustain him against the bleak, gray times which, he knew, would come.

When he awoke later, still wrapped in Kirk's arms, he knew that at least some of his dream must have been reality. He lay quietly, watching Kirk sleep, remembering the words of the old song Kirk had quoted only last morning.

Later that morning, Kirk sat preoccupied through breakfast. Having seen Kirk's concern for his crew, Spock guessed the reason.

"Sir, will you be interviewing Lt. Garrovick today?"

"Yes, this morning." Kirk glanced up from his plate with a knowing smile. "And yes, you can come with me. I don't think he's going to talk though. Spock, I just can't believe that he was payed off to kill me. I don't think he'd accept payment for something like that--he's young, bright, honest, idealistic, trustworthy--and he had no other reason. I know his father; I served under him. We're friends." Kirk threw down his napkin, rose, and paced restlessly back and forth.

"Is it possible that he did it unwillingly?"

"Do you mean, 'was he drugged?' No, McCoy checked him over for that."

"Could he have been subjected to psychomodification?"

Kirk stopped pacing abruptly. "The mind-control device? It's a serious crime on Rigel IV to use it on free, sentient beings but...." Kirk strode to his desk communicator and called the Bridge. "Lieutenant, check the ship's records, please. When was the last time Lt. Garrovick was on Rigel IV for any reason."

After a pause of several minutes, "Ship's records show that Lt. Garrovick was on duty on our last visit to Rigel IV, sir. There is no record that the Lieutenant was ever on Rigel IV, even before he became a crewman on the Vengeance. His last leave was on Earth three months ago."

"Thank you, Uhura," he signed off. "Well, I guess that answers that."

"Are there no psychomodifiers elsewhere? On Earth, perhaps? Can Dr. McCoy test him for evidences of such tampering?"

"There's no way to be sure the device was used; it is undetectable. It's a jealously guarded secret of the Rigellians, and anyway it's outlawed on Earth. The Romulans are supposed to have a similar, but more primitive version of it. I'll have Garrovick taken to Sickbay, and perhaps Dr. McCoy will see something he missed before."

But McCoy could detect nothing out of the ordinary, except that Garrovick seemed

bewildered by what had happened and didn't even know where he had obtained the capsule-gun and virulol. He had been strapped to the same table Spock remembered from his first day on the ship. The monitoring devices attached to the table confirmed he was telling the truth.

"But you must know why you wanted to kill me," Kirk pressed.

"I only remember walking toward you, raising the gun, knowing I was going to kill you--I don't know why!" Garrovick began to break down after almost two hours of intensive tests and questioning, sobbing helplessly. Kirk felt the urge to join him.

Spock took him aside. "Sir, may I speak to you a moment?"

Kirk turned to McCoy; "Make him comfortable, Bones," and led Spock into McCoy's office.

"I would like to speak to the Lieutenant alone once he has rested and is again in control of himself. I believe that I will be able to tell you if his mind has been tampered with at least."

"How, Spock?"

Spock turned away, uncomfortable. "McCoy has told you what happened that night ...after Rigel IV?"

"Yes. But what...oh, I see. You can hypnotize him? But so can McCoy; he says it won't tell us anything we don't already know."

"This is not exactly the same thing as hypnosis. It may work."

Kirk hesitated. "Well, perhaps, but I don't like the idea of you trying it privately."

"You...do not trust me?" Spock noted Kirk's hesitation before he answered.

"Yes, of course. All right. Maybe you can try tomorrow morning. It would make me feel better to know the reason behind this."

Kirk gave instructions to Security to return Garrovick to the brig after the sedative McCoy gave him had taken effect, and he and Spock walked back to the cabin in silence. They attempted a chess game, but Kirk's mood made it impossible for him to concentrate and enjoy the game. He finally stood up impatiently, stretching.

"What I'd really like to do now is a nice, tiring workout in the gym, but McCoy has refused to consider it for another several weeks. He has promised that I can have a few hours a day on the Bridge in another six days, and I'm holding him to his word. Why don't you go to the gym now, and I'll spend a few hours going over these records and reports."

Realizing that Kirk wanted some time to himself, Spock agreed, and left for the gym. Every afternoon for the next several

days, he spent several hours a day there, and returned to his previous habit of occasionally visiting the science labs or Engineering, since Kirk did not seem to want his company. It seemed to him that Kirk had become unusually quiet after that day with Garrovick, and he was avoiding Spock. He spent several hours a day in the mornings, away from the cabin, and refused to let Spock accompany him, or even tell him where he was going. He stayed up late into the night, using his computer terminal, going over the ship's records, or just reading. And then, for no reason, he abruptly forbade Spock to leave the cabin again.

Kirk had not been to bed at all the last night, Spock realized, since when he woke up that morning, he saw that Kirk had fallen asleep at his desk. When he heard Spock stirring, Kirk awoke abruptly from his fitful nap. Ignoring Spock, he stepped into the shower. Spock patiently waited for him to finish. "Five days of this now," Spock thought. "I will speak to him. If he does not answer, I will speak to McCoy."

"Sir, may I ask...." Spock began, as Kirk emerged from the bathroom.

Kirk interrupted coldly. "I am going to sleep for awhile. I don't want to be disturbed. Either be quiet or leave the cabin." He slid into bed, turning his back on Spock.

Spock could not deny the feeling of pain that washed over him. He stood there for several minutes, looking at Kirk, but hardly seeing him, then turned quietly and left the cabin for McCoy's office.

"Doctor, what is wrong with the Captain?"

McCoy looked at him thoughtfully. "Well, he's disturbed about Garrovick. He feels betrayed, I'd guess, by someone he thought respected him. Jim has always relied heavily on his charisma, I guess you could say: his ability to inspire loyalty and even love in his crew, and influence everyone he knows in his favor. The only disadvantage is that he relies on that love, and suffers when it is withdrawn--he seldom uses fear to control his crew like the other captains do."

Spock considered deeply for several moments. "Why then will he not allow me to question Lt. Garrovick? And, Doctor, he is not eating adequately, and hardly sleeping at night. He will not speak to me, nor... touch me. He has refused to let me out of the cabin, even to accompany him, and yet he just told me to be quiet or leave the cabin. What should I do?"

"It sounds more serious than I thought," McCoy admitted, troubled. "Where is he now?"

"He finally went to bed after spending all night sitting at his desk."

"I'll urge him to join me for dinner tonight, and try to get him to talk to me."

It's the best I can do. Thanks for telling me, Spock. You'd better go back now."

For several hours, Spock sat in the day cabin reading as Kirk slept restlessly. When he heard the bed move, he glanced up to see Kirk sit up in bed suddenly, as though waking from a nightmare. Kirk rubbed his face and bleary eyes miserably, moving clumsily to sit on the edge of the bed, almost losing his balance as he reached for his trousers.

"Sir, may I be of assistance?" Spock moved a few steps closer to the end of the bed. In the past, he had always secretly enjoyed helping Kirk dress in the morning, and Kirk had appreciated the attention.

Kirk didn't even look at him, but simply said in a disdainful monotone, "No. Get away from me," as he continued pulling on his clothes. He brushed past Spock and walked out the door without another word.

Deciding that the effort to read anymore was useless, Spock managed to pass the time in light meditation, until McCoy contacted him late that afternoon.

"He talked to me a little about Garrovick and his father, but I agree with you, Spock; it must be something more, and he won't talk about whatever it is. He looked exhausted and had a headache, so I convinced him to eat something, and I slipped him a sedative with his brandy. He's taking a nap now, but he isn't sleeping well. I'll keep trying to find out what's eating him, Spock. But can't you do something to help?"

"I would be risking violence if I tried any harder, Doctor. What will you do when he wakes up?"

McCoy sighed heavily. "Try to convince him that his health is in jeopardy. Do a few tests on him. Tell him I won't allow him back on the Bridge if he doesn't eat and sleep properly. Try again to get him to talk. What else can I do?"

Spock controlled his impulse to sigh heavily. "Thank you, Doctor. I wish you success."

Spock waited for Kirk's return, with some misgivings, until evening. Even wondering about another, more successful assassination attempt, he felt concerned enough to call McCoy to check on Kirk's whereabouts. He discovered that McCoy had had Kirk discreetly watched, and that Kirk had been on the tiny observation deck for some hours. By this time, Spock was certain that something was about to break. Unable to eat supper, meditate or read, he sat silently waiting for Kirk's return. At 2330, he decided that Kirk had possibly decided to spend the night with someone else, and might not be returning at all, and so, exhausted with tension and waiting, he would retire.

As he stepped out of the bathroom after his shower, naked except for a towel, the cabin door slid open and Kirk stepped inside abruptly. Kirk walked up to him,

grabbed the towel and tossed it aside. Spock stood docilely, a green flush spreading over his body, as Kirk looked at him with a demanding, violent possessiveness. Without any warning, he slapped, then backhanded Spock hard across the face, pushed him to the bed and down into it. Wrapping the fingers of one hand painfully in Spock's hair, he took his mouth in a demanding, insensitive kiss, biting down on his lip until he tasted coppery blood. He pulled back and said savagely, "Have you ever been beaten, Spock? Have you ever been whipped?" He twisted his fingers viciously in Spock's hair, and pinched one nipple. "I've neglected your education as a slave." Abruptly, he released Spock's head, and pushed him flat onto the bed. "I should beat you, yes, and chain you again. And this time never release you." His eyes fell on Spock's erect, green-flushed penis, and he laughed derisively, "You'd like that?"

Spock was choked with anger and miserable with shame, but he could not deny that he wanted Kirk at any cost.

Kirk unfastened the wide, thick leather belt from around his waist, and ran it through his hands considerably, then stripped off the rest of his clothes hurriedly, ordering, "Turn over!"

He watched as Spock complied and lay there waiting. Kirk allowed the belt to trail over Spock's buttocks. Spock could not repress a shudder. The belt flicked over him lightly again, not enough even to sting, yet he moaned softly. He managed to regain enough control of himself to turn his head and ask, "Why? Why are you doing this? What have I done?" At those words, the belt came down hard across his ass a half dozen times. He waited tensely for more, but there was only silence. He finally relaxed slightly, then jumped when he felt the tip-edge of the belt trailing down the crevice between his buttocks.

Kirk climbed on the bed, straddling Spock. He massaged his own cock with one hand as he examined Spock, rubbing the green stripes on his buttocks with the other. Relaxing somewhat again, his face pressed into the pillow, Spock thought that at last this strange madness that had taken over Kirk was abating. But the belt descended hard again, and he cried out in pain and surprise. The belt fell repeatedly, until eventually Spock lost count. Then there was the sound of the belt hitting the floor. Hard fingers pried his cheeks apart, and a rigid cock entered him in one ruthless thrust. Kirk's knees bruised the flesh of his legs as he continued the cruel thrusting, squeezing the painfully raw buttocks together around his cock. Eventually, the cool liquid spurted into Spock, filling him to overflowing, and Kirk roughly pulled himself from Spock. Immediately flipping him over on his back again, he looked into his eyes, and derisively, mockingly at his still-swollen cock. "You should be--you shall be--beaten every day."

Spock's voice was frozen in his throat; he could not reply.

Abruptly, Kirk moved off the bed and walked into the day cabin to pour himself a drink. He gulped half of it down, and walked back to the bedside. Spock had turned away from Kirk, facing the wall, or he would have seen Kirk's expression of agonized remorse fighting with anger still unquenched, as he picked up his belt from the floor, then tossed it aside in loathing, into the day cabin where it landed under the desk. He finished his drink as he stepped abruptly into the shower.

When he came out again, Spock was still lying in the same position. He poured himself another brandy, and stood looking down at Spock while he sipped it. Turning the lights to low, he got into bed beside Spock, reached out for his shoulder, and commanded, "Turn over." Spock obeyed wordlessly. Kirk's fingers were gentle as they smoothed his hair and caressed his face softly, following the line of his lips, winged eyebrows, and pointed ear tips. "I'll miss you very much," he murmured regretfully.

"Sir? I do not understand."

"I told you what I would do to you if you tried to escape. I suspected something even before I went over the ship's records. Don't try to deny it. The planetary computer network automatically refused your attempted purchase, and transmitted the information to the ship's computer, where it was recorded on tape. My credit was too low. That damned harp I bought for you, remember? Ironical, isn't it? I was a fool to trust you." He ignored Spock's attempted interruption, and continued.

"Darvat will be delighted to get you; he'll put you to good use. A few crewmen are interested in you, too. Since you seem to be...dissatisfied with being my slave I could loan you out to interested crewmembers for a few credits each...before I sell you on Rigel IV, that is. It might be...stimulating to watch them fuck you."

"Sir, please, I...I..." Spock stuttered, to his shame, the wetness in his eyes threatening to spill over, in the grip of emotion so strong he could not reply.

Kirk ignored him. His eyes shifted away; his voice grew harsher. "Uhura was sorry you didn't join us the night of the party. She's quite curious about you... what you're like in bed. Shall I call her and invite her to join us here tonight?"

"Please, no!" Spock managed to gasp out.

"Oh, why not? She's very good. It would be something...different for you."

"I want no one! No one...but you!"

Losing control completely at last, Spock grasped Kirk's arms hard. His voice trailed down to a soft, eerily unhuman growl: "I will have no one but you." His hands moved forcefully down Kirk's chest, rolling him on his back and holding him there as Spock rose to his knees above Kirk.

"I want you--now!" he demanded, "You are mine!" His mouth impatiently covered Kirk's mouth, smothering any reply he might have made, then hungrily moved over his face, brushing closed eyes, nipping the vulnerable throat, quickly engulfing one ear whole, sinking his teeth into the lobe, his hot tongue into the tender channel. At the same time, one hand stroked Kirk's chest demandingly, pulling at the hard nipples, and the other hand reached downward to pull up Kirk's right knee and stroke the rosegold thigh.

Surprised by the speed and violence of Spock's reaction, and caught between the pleasure and pain of the rough caresses, Kirk tried to stop him, to push him away. Spock hardly noticed. His skin was awash with flame; his brain glowed like a sun's corona. Kirk tried to strike out at him, then reached for his throat. Trapping his arms firmly against the bed, Spock's lips and teeth traveled voraciously over Kirk's body, nipping the edges of pectoral muscles and rib cage, the flare of the hip bone, the slight rise of flesh around the navel, and down one thigh, accompanied by Kirk's involuntary gasps and moans.

When his lips closed over the hard, rose-flushed cock, Kirk finally stopped struggling, and relaxed against him. Spock drew his hands up under the round, muscular ass, squeezing rhythmically as he sucked. When he sensed that Kirk was almost at the point of no return, he stopped sucking, and flipped him over on his stomach. Examining the beautiful ass thoroughly, hungrily, he suddenly sunk his teeth into one perfect globe, simultaneously burying two fingers into the tight richness within Kirk.

"No! No! Let me go, Spock, I order you!" Kirk again struggled to get free. A stinging slap on one tender, already-bitten cheek stopped him momentarily, gasping in pained surprise. A hard hand stroked up his back, pushing down on his shoulders, holding him steady, as the two probing fingers sought out and found the tender gland within him, pressing mercilessly.

As Kirk again began to relax and respond, the fingers were suddenly withdrawn. The hot tip of Spock's penis immediately replaced them, barely penetrating the tight muscle ring, an itchy, pulsating pressure which demanded relief. Kirk felt the spasmodic tightening of his sphincter muscles against Spock's insistent pressure, and then the uncontrollable momentary loosening which pulled Spock's organ still deeper inside him, easing the itchy, longing sensation somewhat. Kirk struggled futilely against Spock's strength to free himself, but he was held fast.

"SPOCK! STOP! Let me GO!" He yelled at Spock frantically, but received no response.

Spock's hands flowed under Kirk, raising his hips, spreading him, caressing his softly vulnerable stomach, thighs and genitals, allowing his cock to stroke tantalizingly over the sensitive rosy

cleft between Kirk's buttocks, and probe softly, insistently, at the spasming orifice, prolonging his anticipation unbearably. When Spock, without any warning, suddenly replaced two fingers deeply into Kirk again, he bucked and cried out with apprehension and desire. Spock flipped Kirk over on his back again, fingers still buried within Kirk's silky warmth, circling slowly, pressing demandingly. Kirk cried out helplessly again as the hot mouth closed on his cock, catching him between the velvet tongue and hard, ivory teeth almost painfully, sucking him down into perdition, until he again was about to overflow with hot lust.

Unable to wait any longer, Spock lifted Kirk's legs over his shoulders, almost bending him double, and holding him tightly, guided his cock to the rosy pucker, still spasming in desire and denial. He had barely begun to enter, with shallow, sharp thrusts, when the sound of Kirk's anguished groan returned him to full awareness of the enormity of his actions. He faltered, looking down in confusion, to meet the wide eyes of Kirk watching him, sensuous lips parted, face flushed with desire and apprehension.

"Don't stop," he whispered, looking up into Spock's blazing eyes.

After a timeless pause, Kirk licked his lips and repeated hoarsely, in a kind of helpless, breathless fascination, "Don't stop now!"

Spock was beyond speech. Holding Kirk's eyes with his, he pushed forward again, watching his face contort in pain as the head of Spock's organ penetrated him. He immediately withdrew again, double ridges rippling past the tightly grasping muscular rim. Kirk tried to writhe away then, and cried out a refusal, but Spock neither knew nor cared what he meant. He pushed forward abruptly, catching the widest part of the flaring ridges just inside Kirk. Balancing himself on one hand, he pinched and rolled Kirk's nipples mercilessly, then ran his hand hard over Kirk's ribs and stomach, and down to his cock, beginning to soften now because of the insistent pain. While Kirk groaned in discomfort, he insistently rubbed and stroked Kirk's cock until he was at the point of orgasm, then began again to thrust slowly forward, sinking his teeth into one thigh pressed against his chest.

The sound of Kirk gasping out his soul, impaled and writhing on Spock's hard flesh, the sensation of Kirk's body yielding to him, the feeling of power, potency, and control, surged through Spock. He never wanted to stop. At each thrust he sank a little deeper into Kirk, his penis swelled a little more, and the double ridges flared a little further, but he would not let himself go. Several times Kirk cried out in pain and tried to push him away; he slowed but would not stop thrusting. Kirk reached for his cock, to bring himself relief, but Spock tore his hands away, holding Kirk's wrists down at his sides as he thrust. At last, sinking all the way into Kirk's tight flesh, he allowed himself to reach a long, shuddering orgasm. Afterwards, he remained



buried in Kirk, willing himself to stay erect. Pausing for a long moment, he looked down into Kirk's fervent, hungry face, watching the breath heave in his glistening chest, the throbbing of the swollen, rose-flushed cock.

He began again slowly, hardly withdrawing his cock, barely vibrating it within Kirk. As he lengthened his strokes slowly, Kirk impatiently tried to urge him on. Spock let one leg slip off his shoulder to encircle his waist, so that he could thrust at a different angle, and Kirk writhed in agonized pleasure/pain. After some minutes, he urged the other leg to wrap around his waist, pushing and twisting his cock inside Kirk who again reached for his own cock--and was again prevented from touching it.

Spock suddenly bent forward, bending Kirk double, and slipping both arms around his back, he pulled Kirk on his lap, still deeply impaled. Kirk cried out softly from the combined discomfort and the exquisite sensation of his cock pressed against the hirsute roughness of Spock's stomach. Spock held him there, sitting motionless on Spock's thighs, as he nipped Kirk's lips and ears, thrusting his tongue deep within them. Then he straightened out his legs and began to lie back on the bed. He released his arms from around Kirk, but captured one nipple in his teeth, licking and sucking, holding Kirk immobile. Kirk moaned in pleasure and frustration. He was soon released and urged into position, sitting on top of Spock, whose penis was still buried deep within him. Spock gazed up at him expectantly, but when he lifted up, giving the impression he might try to escape, the iron hands closed bruisingly hard on his thighs.

Kirk eased himself down again on the engorged cock, wincing in pain, and began to move slowly, rotating his hips. Spock remained unmoving. He would not allow Kirk to touch his own cock, neither was Kirk able to rub it against Spock's body in this position. Glaring down at Spock, lust clouding his vision, Kirk leaned back on his arms and raised one knee, writhing up and down with abandon on the unmoving cock within him, trying to stimulate his own prostate gland, and trying to encourage Spock to reciprocate. He desperately wanted Spock to touch his aching cock. Exhausted, he leaned forward again, shifting his weight from one knee to the other, gyrating his hips, lifting and lowering his body frantically, feeling his elusive climax approaching--only to recede again. Spock watched Kirk with intense, but carefully controlled pleasure, subduing his urge to thrust upward, but when Kirk frenziedly reached forward to pinch his nipples, his cock surged hard within Kirk. Throwing his head back with utter abandon, Kirk redoubled his efforts.

When his fulfillment came at long last, the relief was so sudden, so unexpected, that it was more pain than pleasure. Kirk screamed hoarsely, shuddering so hard that he almost fell to the bed. Spock consumed his climax

with his eyes in the most intense pleasure, but still not allowing himself to climax again. When Kirk rolled off Spock and lay depleted beside him, he rose to kneel over Kirk, calling his name.

Kirk's weary eyes drifted open to focus on the swollen and glistening jade-green organ Spock held in one hand.

"I am not yet satisfied, Kirk. Suck me!"

"No!" One disbelieving look shot at Spock, and Kirk made a swift dive off the bed, but exhaustion made him slow. He was caught and pulled back into Spock's arms. He only managed one weak punch which glanced off Spock's ribs, before his arms were caught behind his back and held immovably.

Spock paused a few minutes, to let Kirk catch his breath and calm down. Then, he took Kirk's mouth in a slow, gentle kiss, easing his tongue deeply inside, in a thorough exploration. As Kirk relaxed, he shifted to hold both wrists in one hand, caressing Kirk's face lovingly with the other hand, brushing over his eyes, closing them. As he slowly eased away from the kiss, the feather-light touch of his thumb teasing over Kirk's lips encouraged him to continued to relax his jaws and mouth while his head was slowly lowered to Spock's lap. The glistening cock, still damp and musky from its sojourn in Kirk's body, touched his open lips and entered his mouth slowly. Spock felt Kirk's surrender as his cock filled Kirk's mouth, pushing his jaws wide apart. He pulled out again until only the tip of his cock lay within Kirk's lips.

"Lick me. Bathe me with your tongue," Spock murmured, his hand behind Kirk's head, urging.

Kirk's tongue reached out to bathe the underside of his cock, and scrub between the flaring ridges, licking Spock clean. Then his lips slid down to Spock's balls, drawing them into his mouth, laving them thoroughly with his tongue.

"Suck me now." Spock settled back and watched as Kirk swallowed his cock, moving back and forth on it, pulling with his tongue and lips. He encouraged Kirk to ever greater efforts, but he had no intention of allowing himself to climax yet, and eventually Kirk's exhaustion slowed him down.

"Now, kneel for me," Spock demanded.

"Please! Not again, not now," Kirk begged, but nevertheless he positioned himself for Spock. He groaned when Spock entered him in one hard thrust, breaching his abraded tissues. He continued to thrust in long, hard, steady strokes for a very long time. Just when Kirk, half-fainting from exhaustion, knew he couldn't take anymore, two hard hands closed around his flaccid cock, massaging it mercilessly until, to Kirk's amazement, it became erect.

Spock held Kirk motionless with one arm as he began to pick up speed, fucking him so

fast with both hand and cock that the sore-ness gave way to an incredible burning sensation that grew and spread from the two loci to fill his entire body. The burning glow overflowed Kirk's body, touching Spock, and reverberated between them in a shared cataclysm so intense that Kirk nearly lost consciousness.

Spock slumped down across Kirk, one arm over him, his cock still buried within Kirk. As he recovered, he gradually became aware of the gravity of what he had done. Pulling out carefully, he examined Kirk for signs of injury, finding only a few small drops of red blood. But Kirk's flesh seemed to quiver beneath his touch, so he lay on his side, gathered Kirk up in his arms, and held him tenderly, whispering softly, "Are you all right, Jim?"

Kirk's eyes opened a moment, flicking an unreadable look up at Spock, then he buried his face in Spock's neck. His arms slid around Spock, holding him even closer. In an instant he was asleep. Before allowing himself to sleep, Spock felt obliged to analyze the unknown emotion welling up inside him. Illogical, perhaps, but it was joy, he decided: Kirk had not rejected him. He brushed a soft kiss on Kirk's forehead. Spock found he was able to dismiss all concern about his fate, and sleep deeply.

In the last few weeks before their arrival at Earth, their relationship entered a new phase. Although McCoy had only given permission for a daily three-hour tour of duty on the Bridge, Kirk had to get various records and recommendations ready for Starfleet in anticipation of his promotion, so he worked almost all day. When he was not actually working, he was very preoccupied. He gave Spock a number of errands to run, and various record-keeping and other computer work to do. Spock willingly took as much of the work load off Kirk as he could, also working all day. He was glad of the opportunity to work, but he would have liked a chance to talk to Kirk. When evening came, Kirk would have his supper in the cabin, alone with Spock, but he was tired and showed no inclination to talk seriously. Sometimes he would play some favorite music of his, and sometimes he spoke of Earth, but always lightly, reminiscing and telling amusing anecdotes.

After dinner, he would take off his clothes, stretch, and do a few mild exercises to soothe his cramped muscles. He would cast a covert smile at Spock from time to time, or perhaps a remark of veiled challenge. He would touch Spock, then draw away as though he didn't want Spock to touch him. But then, he would pull Spock into the shower with him, caressing liquid soap over his body, and Spock would reciprocate until they were both aroused.

At first confused by Kirk's actions, Spock began to understand by the second evening that this was indeed a challenge; Kirk was tantalizing him, teasing him with his body. He took up the challenge the next evening. When Kirk was taking off his clothes, he moved silently up to him,

trapping Kirk's arms in his tunic, pulling Kirk's body hard against his, and taking his mouth in a demanding kiss. Then he released him uninterestedly, and coldly walked away. Kirk said nothing, but his eyes were very bright in anticipation. He pulled his remaining clothes off, conscious of Spock's eyes on his body and his swelling cock. He did a few exercises, but Spock looked away, feigning indifference.

After their shower together, Spock could no longer pretend a lack of interest. They were both deeply aroused when Spock impatiently pulled him to the bed, then pushed him down into it, holding him there, licking the moisture from Kirk's still-damp body as it writhed and struggled against him. He had to wrestle Kirk into submission before he could kneel between Kirk's legs, raise them up, and enter him in one quick thrust. Kirk continued to struggle, almost managing to dislodge Spock from his damp, slippery body, until Spock leaned all the way forward, trapping Kirk's doubled legs between both their chests. His cock slid irresistably deeper into Kirk's body. He took Kirk's lips in a savage kiss, then growled into his ear, "I will have you now! You cannot escape me! You are very beautiful...and you are mine!"

Kirk looked up at him with enormous eyes filled with swirling green-gold motes, moaning in wordless, insincere negation--and avid anticipation--as Spock began to pound into him relentlessly.

They played this game on numerous occasions, Spock sometimes taking Kirk on the floor, across the desk, or even in the cramped shower. Spock, although not completely understanding Kirk's fascination with the game, cooperated wholeheartedly, adding imaginative variations on each occasion. He learned how to excite Kirk verbally, and proved to be a tireless, inventive lover, spurred on not only by his fear that he would lose Kirk, but also by the almost guilty satisfaction he gained from the pretended domination.

As they drew ever nearer to Earth, Kirk became more and more exhausted from trying to catch up with and finish all his last minute duties. Some nights he would smile tiredly, put his arms around Spock, his head on Spock's shoulder, and say regretfully, "No games tonight, Spock. I'm just too tired." And Spock, understanding what he needed, would help him to bed, soothe his headaches and cramped muscles, hold him comfortingly, and help him sleep.

Spock again urged that he be allowed to talk to Garrovick, and convinced Kirk that for the sake of Garrovick, and also Kirk's future safety, the truth should be discovered, if possible. One morning, they went to the brig together. Kirk dismissed the guards in the outer room, but insisted on remaining there himself, out of sight. Spock entered Garrovick's cell alone.

"Lieutenant, I believe I may be able to prove your innocence, if you will cooperate with me."



"But I did try to kill the Captain! You yourself saw me!" Garrovick spoke despairingly.

"Yes, but I believe that you were forced to do so against your will. If you let me try, I can find out if your mind was tampered with."

"How will you do that?" he asked somewhat fearfully, but with a glimmer of hope.

"My people are able to use a technique somewhat like hypnosis, but more useful. If you let me try, it will not harm you at all, and I believe it may save you and your father considerable distress. The Captain is also concerned about what will happen to you. May I try? I will touch your face lightly. It is only necessary for you to relax and not to resist. There is nothing to fear."

The Lieutenant gulped nervously, but Spock's gentle manner and deep, soothing voice had its effect on him. He closed his eyes tightly and tried to relax, but at the touch of Spock's fingers on his face, he jumped. Spock spoke softly, calmly, "My mind to your mind..." and Garrovick perceived the unfamiliar, but soothing touch of Spock's mind in his. He gradually let himself be reassured into relaxing under the touch. He was then urged into recalling the events of the day of his assassination attempt, step by step. Spock followed his thoughts, plainly observing the rift between his normal daily duties, and the attempted murder. There was no logical connection at all. It was as though he had been programmed to kill, then told to forget the circumstances of his programming. The programmer hadn't bothered to imprint a reason in his subject's memory. Spock wondered what had activated Garrovick's programming, his orders to kill, and followed a thin strand of thought to its origin, discovering that the simple fact that the Vengeance was within a few weeks of Earth had activated the programming. He also made sure that the programming was inactivated, so that Garrovick would no longer be a danger to Kirk.

On the theory that Garrovick's mind had been tampered with during his last leave on Earth, Spock followed his memories to those few days: his reunion with his family, an interview with a Starfleet official, several days of innocent merrymaking--and the unaccountably blank space of half a day in his memory. There was no possibility of finding out what had occurred then; the memories had been destroyed, wiped clean from his mind. Though Spock had never before perceived the effects of psychomodification, he was certain that no natural agent had caused this complete hiatus in Garrovick's mind. It was as though the brain cells carrying the memory had been ripped apart, some destroyed, the others left there unconnected, their fibrous ends dangling. Deciding to go back over Garrovick's memories of his leave, since they might hold some clue to the perpetrator of this mind-rape, Spock committed to memory the names of officials, friends, relatives, anyone he had seen, any place he

had been, although they all seemed innocent enough. By this time, both Spock and Garrovick were exhausted. It was time to break the meld. Spock gave one last look where his suspicions were beginning to center--the meeting with the Starfleet official--and gently withdrew from Garrovick's mind, carefully dulling the memory of his probing somewhat, so as not to cause the innocent crewman unnecessary anguish.

Garrovick blinked tiredly as Spock rose to leave. "Lieutenant, I have discovered that you are indeed innocent of any intent to kill the Captain. I will relate my findings to him, and he will do whatever he can for you. It would be best now if you could sleep."

Spock related to Kirk and McCoy what he had discovered while they sipped brandy in Kirk's cabin. "Do you know a Commodore Bloch, sir?"

"Hmmm. Yes, I believe so. But I don't know him very well. Why?"

"He may be involved in the murder attempt. During Lt. Garrovick's last leave on Earth, he was called into Commodore Bloch's office for no apparent reason. He was subjected to some rather pointless questioning, possibly designed to find out where he would be for the next few days. It is possible that he was then followed, drugged with a capsule-gun perhaps, and taken to an illegal mind-probe, where he was programmed to kill you."

"Let's see what we can find out about this Bloch." Kirk consulted his computer terminal, but the flat, sexless voice told them remarkably little.

"What we need to know is which faction he belongs to, who his friends are," McCoy said impatiently.

"Factions?" asked Spock with an inward sigh, and thought, "The more I hear of Earth and its government, the less sense it makes."

McCoy impatiently explained. "It all depends on what policies would be to which cartel's benefit. Some belong to one faction, other corporations belong to another. One major faction wants to funnel what's left of Earth's resources into building up Starfleet into an invasion force; they have visions of an imperial Earth-empire--controlled by them, of course. Another major faction wants to disband Starfleet, or use it strictly in a merchant and pirate capacity, and a police force around the inner system, to prevent invasion. They want to funnel everything we've got into developing Earth into their own little paradise, under their absolute control, of course. And Starfleet wants independence from both factions--from any government interference. They don't believe that the Romulan threat is over. Between the major factions, there is an underground war going on that sometimes seems as if it could tear the government apart. The Presidium Directors, each of whom represents a major cartel, spend most of their time squabbling and dirty-dealing among themselves, trying to win the few unaffiliated

corporations over to their side. Just to live things up, there are some minor factions, too."

"...Who encourage the squabbling among the major factions, hoping to benefit from it," Kirk added.

"The only thing they seem to agree on right now, is that they all want more wealth, more power, more loot. And we're supposed to get it for them. Then, they may decide the next day to disband Starfleet."

"Oh, never that, Bones!" Kirk mused silently for a moment. "We contacted Starfleet today to tell them we'd be arriving in Earth orbit late tomorrow night. I've been ordered to report to Admiral Rossini's office at 0900 the following morning."

"Sir, I would like to accompany you....," Spock began.

"Spock, I'm sorry, but you can't go with me. You look like a Romulan. It would be far too dangerous for you."

"Sir, I believe there will be another attempt on your life, and they may succeed this time."

"They won't get the chance, Spock. I am going to make sure that we reach Earth orbit a little before the rest of the Fleet. The moment we get there, I'm going to have Scotty beam Mr. Garrovick and me down to his father's house, which is not far from headquarters. I think he'll be grateful that I saved his son from a courtmartial, and will be able to give us some helpful information--I'd like to know who's trying to kill me, and why. In the morning, I'll take an aircar to headquarters for my appointment. No one except you two and Scotty will know that I left the night before, and they won't be expecting me to arrive in an aircar. I'll land on the roofport and take the stairs to the Admiral's office, which is on the top floor. Even if they see me they won't have time to do anything about it before I arrive."

"What is to prevent them from attacking you when you leave?"

"The Admiral. I'll simply tell him what is going on. Once he makes it clear that I am under his protection, probably with a few of his private guards, I doubt that there will be any trouble with assassins, especially not in broad daylight. That would lead to open warfare between the corporations, and that would profit no one."

"You seem pretty certain that you are getting that promotion, Jim."

"I don't think that the Chief of Personnel Assignments would be interested in talking to a mere Captain otherwise, Bones."

"Well, then, congratulations, Fleet Captain!"

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When they were alone later, lying in each other's arms, Kirk tried to console a

troubled Spock. "I'll miss you. I wish I could take you with me." He sighed. "I don't know how long Rossini is going to keep me there. There's bound to be some red tape to go through, and he may want me to stay on the base for several days, or even longer. I'll have to meet my supporters, go to conferences.... But there will be time afterward to take some leave. I'll beam back up to the ship and take you back down with me--somehow. Would you like to see Earth?"

"I have always wanted to see Earth. I want to go with you."

"I'd like to show you San Francisco or some of the other cities, but it's too dangerous. If someone caught sight of the 'Romulan', you might get torn limb from limb. Maybe McCoy can help modify your appearance, but there isn't much he can do for those elegant ears, outside of some severe surgical pruning."

Spock shuddered, not entirely insincerely.

Kirk grinned, stroking an ear-tip. "No. I won't let him do that. So, no cities for you, except maybe in an aircar tour. But I have a cabin in the mountains in Nevada, and we can spend shoreleave there. It's very beautiful at this time of year. Maybe we can even visit my old home in Iowa if my brother Sam isn't there now. I don't want him to know about you. His wife and son were killed in a Romulan attack. He's still affected by it; he wouldn't understand."

Kirk pensively stroked the furred planes of Spock's chest. "If something does happen to me, there is a microtape in my safe: my will. I've given you to McCoy. He'll be good to you. There's no one else I can trust."

"Sir. That is not my...primary concern."

"I know. Spock, these last few weeks have been..." Kirk paused, trying to find the right words, "very, very good. I wish it could be like this forever. I don't know how to put this, but...has it been...good for you? Do you still want to leave?"

"I do not want to leave you."

"I've grown very...fond of you, Spock. Can you forgive me for hurting you? I don't want to cause you pain. I've even considered letting you go, letting you return to Vulcan, but--oh, God!-- I can't do it! I won't let you go! Never!"

Spock returned the pressure of Kirk's arms, the intensity of his passion, knowing it was sincere, and returning it, giving himself to Kirk unreservedly. And wondering how soon it would be before Kirk's attention would be diverted yet again by another Sa-aa or Uhura.

"There is nothing for me on Vulcan. It is only you I want."

Kirk pressed his body to Spock's desperately, in an agony of arousal. "This is our



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last night together for a little while. I'm going to miss you so much. Oh, Spock...." He finally paused, not knowing how to express what he felt in words. "Just take me, Spock. Fuck me! Make love to me! Now! I want to feel you moving inside me again."

Spock was only too willing to oblige. He made slow, gentle love to Kirk half the night, and when he was not actively engaged in loving Kirk, held his love-limp body in his arms, kissing him tenderly, stroking his bright hair. He finally fell into a light sleep toward morning, in spite of his intentions otherwise.

It was almost 1100 when Kirk's teasing fingers brought him to full wakefulness. He would have thought they were both drained by the previous night's intense lovemaking, but Kirk's skillful touch played on his nerves until they were both aroused again. Then Kirk reciprocated by making slow, delicious love to Spock, moving his cock in long, slow strokes, playing him like a fine musical instrument, until his whole body sang in time with the movement inside him.

It was awhile before either wanted to get out of bed.



While Sulu was locking the Vengeance into Earth orbit, Kirk was hastily collecting Scott and Garrovick, and heading for the transporter room. Scott fed in the coordinates, shaking his head at the unauthorized beamdown. Kirk waved a somewhat devil-may-care farewell to Spock just before the mist of golden sparkles took him, depositing him in the small garden of Commodore Garrovick's house at dusk. Kirk took a deep breath of the air of his home planet, taking care to check around him quickly to make sure no one had noticed their arrival, before he allowed his attention to be caught by the beautiful, deep cobalt blue of the sky, shading lighter at the horizon, the sweet smell of the flowers of early summer, the songs of crickets and sleepy birds, the gentle breeze, cool and moist, caressing his face. "Spock would have liked this," he mused silently, "if only I could have brought him."

Kirk and Garrovick both sighed deeply for a moment, then headed toward the Commodore's small house. Kirk was very glad that the Commodore preferred these accommodations to the usual hotel. And he was relieved when he saw that the Commodore appeared to be home. When he answered the door, they entered quickly.

"Bob! Jim! How are you?" The Commodore greeted them jovially, throwing his left arm around his son's shoulders, and shaking Kirk's hand.

"Alive and kicking--so far!" Kirk smiled. "Sorry we dropped in on you out of the blue, but I didn't want anyone to know we were coming. We have some serious talking to do. I hope you're not busy?"

"I've got some paperwork to clear up for Starfleet, but nothing that can't

wait. My housekeeper left a tray of sandwiches and salad for me tonight. I was about to have some. Come join me and we'll talk."

They sat down together, each with a plate of food, on comfortable chairs arranged around a fireplace, the burning wood taking the damp chill from the air.

"And how is life aboard the Vengeance, son?"

"Dad, I...tried to kill the Captain," the Lieutenant blurted out.

Kirk hastened to explain the situation, assuring the Commodore that his son would not be prosecuted. When the Lieutenant finished his part of the story, he looked exhausted and somewhat distraught, so the Commodore walked upstairs with him, arm around his shoulders comfortingly, gave him a sedative, and settled him into the spare bedroom, then returned to Kirk.

"Captain, I'm extremely grateful for what you did. What can I do for you in return?"

"I need your help, Commodore. I have to know who is trying to kill me, and why. I need some protection until my meeting with Admiral Rossini tomorrow morning. And we have to find out where the mind-probe that is the cause of your son's murder attempt is located. Do you know a Commodore Bloch?"

"My God! A mind-probe here? It will have to be located and destroyed. We can't afford to have open warfare between the corporations. If the other factions find out that one of them has been using such tactics, there will be Hell to pay!.... Is my son all right now? No further danger to you?"

"Yes, Commodore. A very talented friend of mine made sure of that. I have no objection to him resuming duty on the Vengeance, unless he feels he must transfer."

"I'm grateful. I'll do whatever I can to help you. Whoever is responsible for this is also an enemy of mine, or they would not have chosen Bob for their dirty work. Since I'm on the base most of the time now, and involved in Starfleet politics, I hear most of the rumors and sub rosa information. And I think I know who is involved with this. The strongest faction now is the one having the effrontery to call itself the 'Peace Party.' He named a number of Directors and Starfleet officials, including Bloch. "They obviously want to discredit me, and make sure that their own choice for Fleet Captain is appointed, but I can't say which of these people might be directly responsible for your problems--nor for my son's. And I don't think it really matters. The important thing is to find and destroy that psychomodifier without advertising its presence. Can you imagine what it would be like here if every faction, every corporation, had its own mind-probe, and used it on anyone they pleased to gain even more wealth and power?"

"So, we'll find it and destroy it, restoring the shaky balance of the government again," Kirk said cynically.

"Well, Jim, it isn't your problem anymore. It's your job to stay alive and be the best Fleet Captain we ever had. There's a big surprise in store for you tomorrow, too, and it will be all you can handle for awhile. Now, how about a few hours nap before that meeting tomorrow?" Shunting aside Kirk's attempts to discuss the situation further, he found him a blanket and indicated a comfortable sofa. He handed Kirk a small computer-activator card. "My government aircar is on the other side of the house. Take it tomorrow. I'll leave after you in an airtaxi. This chronometer is set to wake you up in plenty of time. Goodnight, Jim!"

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Kirk's trip to Starfleet base in the morning was uneventful. Making himself as inconspicuous as possible, he walked the short distance to the Admiral's office where, as expected, he was appointed Fleet Captain, and offered a temporary guard of the Admiral's own men. Kirk settled back to discuss the details of his command.

"And now, Fleet Captain, watch!" Rossini activated a large hologram vidscreen. While Kirk watched open-mouthed in admiration, a beautiful silver-white ship sailed across a sea of stars. Two warp engines were mounted on struts attached to a cylindrical, tapered hull. A saucer rose above that.

"Your new ship, Captain! The first of its kind--and probably the last, if the 'Peace' faction have anything to say about it. We disagreed about what to name it."

He handed Kirk a bundle of several microtapes. "Here are the specifications, operating and maintenance directives, your new orders...and a list of proposed names for your new ship. Which one do you like? We thought we might as well let you choose."

Kirk tried to pull himself together, unwilling to let the Admiral see how overwhelmed he was. He looked carefully at the list in his hand. One name seemed to leap out at him--a majestic sailing ship, a very early rocket-powered vehicle important to the history of space travel, an early warp-drive ship, one of the first to fight the Romulans.... "The Enterprise," he breathed.

"So be it. The Enterprise," the Admiral smiled. "Now I know you'd like to see her right away, so I've arranged for you to be beamed up later today, after you've met some of your backers."

"Thank you, sir! About my crew...."

"I guessed that you would want your old crew back--you have such an unusual rapport with them--so I've taken the liberty of informing your First Officer to see that they are all packed and ready to leave by this evening. When they see their new

quarters, I think they won't mind missing out on a day or two of shore leave! You may call the Vengeance yourself this evening and give the order to evacuate your old ship. It will be rebuilt again if possible, but that is likely to take more than a year, and we are anxious that you shouldn't lose any time departing after your shore leave. You will need 125 more crewmen for the Enterprise. We have included a list of names for your approval. Unfortunately, most of them aren't ready to leave yet. We have had to screen them to avoid certain...problems. The 'Peace Party', you know." The Admiral paused thoughtfully. "It is important that you are ready to leave in three weeks, or sooner if possible. So, I have put into your officers' hands various material briefing them on the new ship's operation. And I suggest you study yours immediately."

Kirk nodded, not trusting himself to speak. There were so many things he didn't quite understand; he needed time to think. But he obediently followed the Admiral to a lunch he didn't want, with a group of the Admiral's backers--now his backers also. He had little sympathy with politics, but he tried to listen and remember what he heard, until he realized that both the flamboyantly-dressed Corporation men and the Starfleet officers were purposefully saying very little of any consequence. He knew that some of them would want to speak to him again in private before he left Earth. The day passed in hurried confusion, Kirk waiting impatiently for a chance to contact his ship.

Transferring crewmen from one ship to another was not as simple a matter as Admiral Rossini made it sound. The process of intership beaming was possible, but not particularly safe, unless the transporters on both ships were synchronized and adjusted carefully so that they could be used in concert with each other. So, as soon as he could, Kirk contacted the Security Chief on the Vengeance and put him in charge of organizing parties of crewmen to be beamed down to Earth, then back up to the Enterprise. He gave Mr. Scott the task of synchronizing the transporters--not easy, since they were very different models. He had Uhura notify the heads of the various departments to organize any records or materials to be taken to the new ship. He also spoke to Spock, asking him to pack his personal belongings for him, to see that they were properly labeled, and taken to the transporter room. It was an incredibly complicated operation. He had intended on beaming up to the Enterprise that evening, but he was still sitting at Headquarters Communications directing the changeover, when an old friend of his, Gary Mitchell, walked in at 2300.

"Hi, Jim! I thought I'd find you here. Why don't you let your officers take over for awhile so you can get some rest? I know a nice little place where we can get a drink and unwind a bit. Then you can get yourself a nice bed for a few hours. You can contact them again,

later, if you must. They're a good crew, Jim, the best in Starfleet; they don't need nursemaiding."

Kirk gave in. He knew he was exhausted, badly in need of some food, a few drinks, a soft bed. If he went to either ship now, he knew that the excitement and confusion would prevent even a few hours sleep.

The bar, a favorite with Starfleet officers, was a dark, friendly place, bigger than it looked, that specialized in a limited menu and strong drinks. Kirk, indulging himself in a large steak and a Finagle's Folly, was beginning to feel decidedly mellow, when he spotted another old friend of his entering.

"Areel! Come join us!" Kirk called. A little later, Gary disappeared, and they sat reminiscing over old times.

"Jim, where are you staying?"

"I was supposed to beam up to my ship, but I don't want to; I'll never get any rest there. So I guess I don't have a place to stay. Do you have any suggestions?" He looked inquiringly at Areel, with mock innocence.

"As a matter of fact, I do! Since I probably won't see you for another year, why don't you come home with me? Just for a little while?"

Kirk answered by kissing her. Before the kiss got too deep, he rose, taking her arm, and they departed. He never saw the look of fury in Gary's face when he returned to discover that Kirk had left, and he had called Bloch's men for nothing.

Kirk awoke in Areel's bed late the next morning. A note on her pillow explained that she had had to leave for work, and to go ahead and make himself some breakfast if he wanted. Guiltily, Kirk decided to forego breakfast. He jumped into his clothes, and left Areel's apartment warily, hoping no enemies had trailed him here. Hiring an airtaxi, he quickly made his way to the base transporter facility. He contacted the Vengeance first, asking if Spock had beamed over to the Enterprise yet with his personal belongings.

"Captain, my records show that Spock has not beamed over yet. One moment, please, sir." Uhura contacted her Communications assistant, Lt. Palmer, on the Enterprise, and asked whether either Spock or the Captain's suitcases had arrived, but the answer was negative. Then she called the Captain's cabins on both ships. Finally, she tried calling Spock on both ships' intercom systems, but he did not answer. She contacted her very impatient Captain again.

"We cannot locate Spock, sir. Shall I have Security...."

"No. I'm beaming up now to the Vengeance. Have the transporter room stand by."

But it was a long wait before the transporter was clear. Kirk was jumping with impatience when he was finally beamed aboard. He pushed past groups of noisy crewmen, and organized chaos, practically running to his cabin, a premonition of disaster tightening his throat. When the door finally slid aside, he stood rooted to the threshold in shock. Everything in his cabin, the contents of every shelf and drawer, had been ransacked and thrown to the floor. His safe had been phased open and its contents removed. His two suitcases lay empty and overturned on the floor. Worst of all, there was no sign of Spock. Seeing that the com unit was damaged, he called Security from the neighboring cabin, then he called McCoy.

For the rest of the day, he organized Security to investigate the situation, search both ships, and question every crewman. It was a practically impossible job. The Security team organizing the ship change-over assured Kirk that if Spock had beamed anywhere, they would have seen him. No one had seen Spock since the evening Kirk had beamed down to Earth, and Kirk was the last person to talk to him on ship's communications.

After a few hours of this, despair and anger filled Kirk's mind. He felt himself get more and more frantic, begin to make unreasonable demands, and yell at innocent crewmen. He found a quiet corner of the ship and sat, his head in his hands, trying desperately to think of another approach. He restated the problem to himself, realizing that the question of whom ransacked his cabin--he was certain that it wasn't Spock--and also why they did it, was of secondary importance to the question: Where was Spock? And he knew a way he might find the answer to that question. Calling Uhura on the nearest com unit, he arranged a tie-in with Sulu on the Enterprise Bridge, and Ensign Grey on the Vengeance.

"Lieutenant, I want you to train the Enterprise's sensors on the Vengeance, and Ensign, you are to train your sensors on the Enterprise. Check for Vulcan readings. Thoroughly! Then, Lieutenant, if you find nothing, I want you to coordinate a search program with Ensign Grey. You will scan Earth and surrounding space for any readings resembling Vulcan, also check for any anomalies, nearby ships, anything. Report to me every hour, or immediately if you find anything. Anything at all! I'll be in the briefing room for awhile. Kirk out."

A two-hour conference in the briefing room with McCoy, Scott, and Pollack, the Security Chief, provided no new ideas, only frayed nerves. He finally dismissed them. Finding himself with nothing to do for the moment, he became aware that he was absolutely exhausted, wrung out, and he sat rubbing his monumentally aching head. He jumped when McCoy spoke behind him.

"Jim, why don't you rest now? Beam over to your new ship with me. You haven't

even seen it yet! You could lie down for a little while in your new quarters. I had one of the yeomen check to make sure the bed was made up. It's all ready for you. You can tell Sulu where to contact you. Come on. I'll give you something for that headache."

In a state of numb despair, Kirk allowed himself to be urged to the transporter room and beamed over to the Enterprise. He paid no attention to the shiny new machinery, the roomy corridors...nothing, as he allowed McCoy to lead him to his cabin. He took McCoy's headache pills, but adamantly refused a sedative.

"Jim, have you thought that...just maybe...Spock left voluntarily...because he wanted to?"

"No! I don't believe that! He wouldn't...."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Get out! Leave me alone!"

"All right! All right, Captain. I take it all back."

Kirk muttered defiantly. "I am sure, Bones. And anyway, since he didn't use either ship's transporter or shuttle craft, he'd need another vessel. Where would he get a ship?" But that question started a whole new train of thought. Every ship, even if shielded from sight and from sensor probe, left behind electromagnetic, or space-time disturbances, which in the case of a ship in orbit, should be relatively easy to find and, if they were lucky, trace. Revitalized, Kirk contacted Sulu, and requested a report.

"Sir, we have completed the scan for Vulcan readings. The results are negative."

"All right. Contact the Science Officer and his assistant, and have them work with you and Ensign Grey. Calibrate sensors for detection of any disturbances caused by a ship in orbit within beaming distance of us. The ship probably used shields to avoid detection, possibly a very effective cloaking device. As soon as the disturbance is found, I want it traced. Have the Enterprise ready to leave orbit and follow it at a moment's notice, Lieutenant."

Barely waiting for Sulu to acknowledge, Kirk called the Security Chief and told him to expedite the ship changeover immediately, even if no one got any rest, and that they were leaving orbit very soon indeed. Then he told Scott to ready the Enterprise warp and impulse drives for immediate departure, and repeated his plan of action and his orders.

McCoy could no longer restrain himself. "Jim! What about Starfleet? You're not going to hijack the Enterprise?"

"Oh, I'm not? Just wait and see, Doctor, just wait and see! I'll do anything to find Spock and bring him back. Anything!"

McCoy left, speechless for the first time in Kirk's memory.

Feeling better than he had for hours, Kirk finally lay down to rest. Scott had implied the whole thing was a wild goose chase, but Kirk's command intuition told him otherwise. He was sure they would succeed.

When Sulu's call came, it seemed to Kirk that he had only slept a moment. "Captain, we have located a faint trail very close to the Vengeance. The last of the crew is ready to beam over, and we are preparing to follow."

Kirk made haste to the Bridge. First stopping at Communications, he spoke to Uhura in an undertone, asking her to ignore any attempts by Starfleet to contact them. Then, he took the con from Scott, to direct the pursuit.



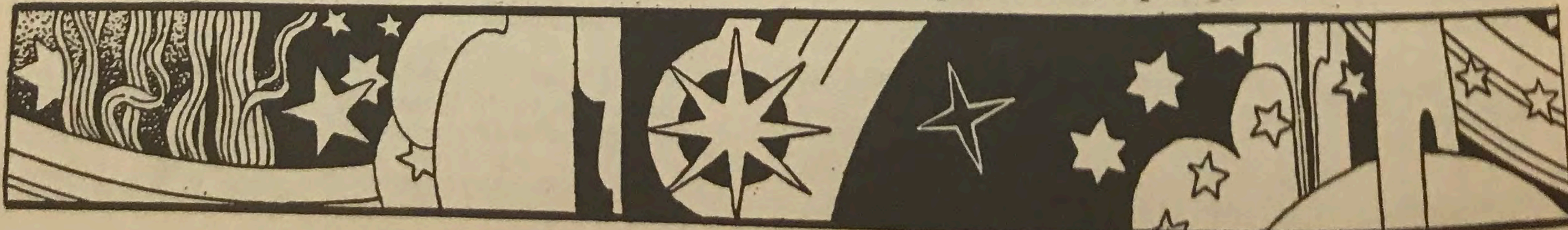
Eight hours later, the Enterprise was deep in interstellar space. The trail she was following had vanished, and no amount of searching could locate it again.

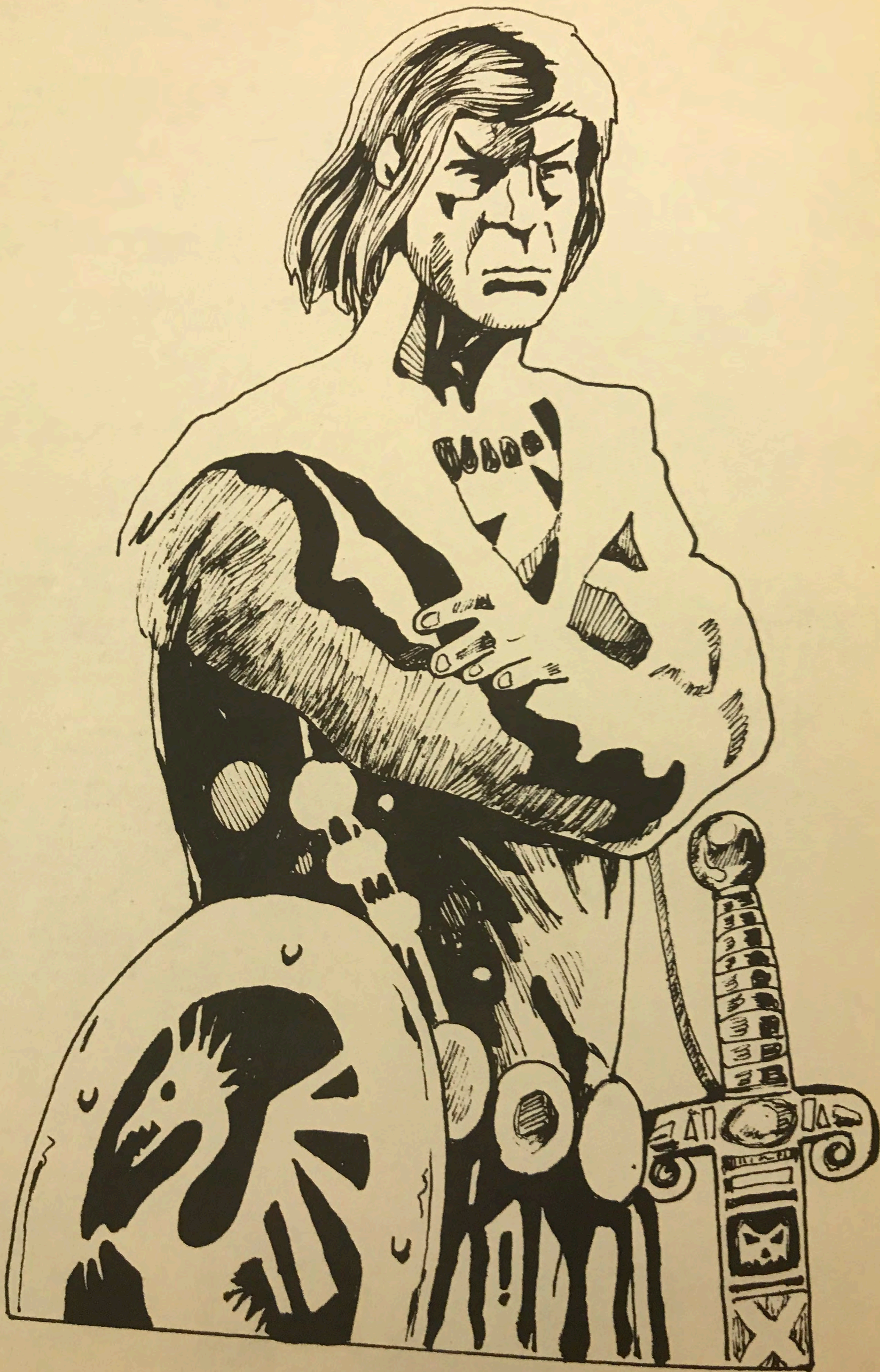
"Now what, Jim? Do we go back to Earth and throw ourselves on Starfleet's mercy?"

"No, Bones. We search every planet in this quadrant, if necessary, until we find him.... Sulu, Vlasic, compute the probable course the ship would have taken, plot it out, and find the probable destination, or at least any planets which come near to that course. Head for the nearest. Call me when we get there.... Mr. Scott take over."

He left the Bridge quickly, before McCoy could follow, and found himself on the Observation Deck, with no memory of how he had gotten there, or how long he had been standing, looking at the stars. Wetness burst from his eyes and ran down his cheeks, stinging. He rested his forehead on the adamantium glass of the observation port, pressed his right hand to the cold surface, and sobbed once only.

"Spock. Oh, Spock."





PART III

Heat waves shimmered, distorting the landscape into mirage, promising cool lakes where there were none. Wind, bringing the scent of alkaline dust and hot rock, ruffled Spock's long, unruly hair. His mount snuffed and tossed its head restlessly. The canrouls, though native to this part of Rigel IV, tolerated the extreme heat of late afternoon less well than Spock; they moved slowly through the hills, heads down, expressing their stolid reluctance.

The heat would pass, like everything else, Spock knew. He scanned the gathering storm-dark clouds at the distant horizon. First the rains would come, and the winds, then the fierce ice-storms and stinging snows, whipped into an icy frenzy. Then as the planet moved away from Rigel, in its long elliptical orbit, bitter cold would set in. There would be no more snow, no moisture at all; the hills would again become a desert. After the hill people had slaughtered most of their herds, many would die from hunger, cold, and sickness. The townspeople, however, would rely upon the food and fuel they had gathered throughout the long summer and stored within guarded stockades.

Spock had first sought refuge with the townspeople after his escape, but they were a very narrow, xenophobic people, and would tolerate no stranger among them. They drove him out, onto the barren hills, probably, they thought, to be killed by the fierce tribesmen who lived there.

Spock considered the irony of the situation. The townspeople, the most advanced civilization here, would not have him, and drove him out, but the hill people, mere barbarians, had found him, half dead from exposure, half-healed wounds, starvation and thirst, and had decided to let him live. They had nursed him back to health.

So now he dressed in the tribal costume of the hill people and rode with them, hunting and herding, raiding and thieving from the townspeople. The tribe grew to trust him, respect his honesty and cleverness, and appreciate his strength and endurance. Most important, perhaps, they knew that he was not interested in the few, jealously guarded young women in the tribe. Spock, in turn, appreciated the silent stoicism of the people. He was grateful that they never intruded into his solitude unless invited to do so, and never questioned him or meddled in his privacy. Gradually, Spock became a kind of lieutenant to one of the tribal chiefs, helping to locate and set up safe camps, plan out routes, and keep the herds in order.

When finally the people reached their destination, they dismounted, and began to

set up camp, make their cooking fires, prepare food, and repair their clothes and meager belongings. Spock urged his canroul along the spine of the long, curved ridge that served as a lookout for this temporary encampment. As he stood watch atop the ridge, the small, unbearably bright disc of Rigel sank lower in the sky until it was covered by the clouds at the horizon, turning them briefly into a glory of orange, gold and green. Then it fell beneath the horizon. The light faded from the sky.

Spock urged the sleepy canroul back across the ridge to the other end. He looked out across the hills, ignoring the activity in the encampment below. It was several hours yet before he would be relieved from his post by another guard, and before he would be able to eat and drink. He did not care. The pointlessness of his existence weighed heavily on him tonight. He felt the pull of the half-formed bond, drawing him to Kirk.... It was hopeless. Kirk would never find him. Would he even look? And even if he did, how long could it be before he gave up the search? Kirk had shown no awareness of the bond, and was easily satisfied with other companionship, other sex-partners. Had he already forgotten Spock?

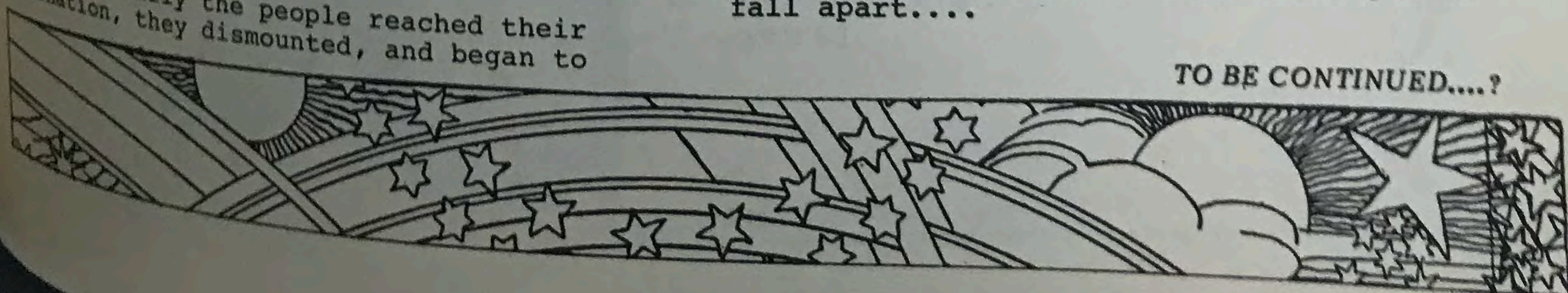
Spock watched the gathering dark bring the silver stars. He allowed his Vulcan controls to slip; there was no one here to see or to care. Such pain and longing filled him that he could hardly see through unshed tears or swallow past the ache in his throat. He longed with all his soul for just one more sight, one more touch, once more to hear Kirk's clear voice, once more to feel the deck of the starship beneath his feet.

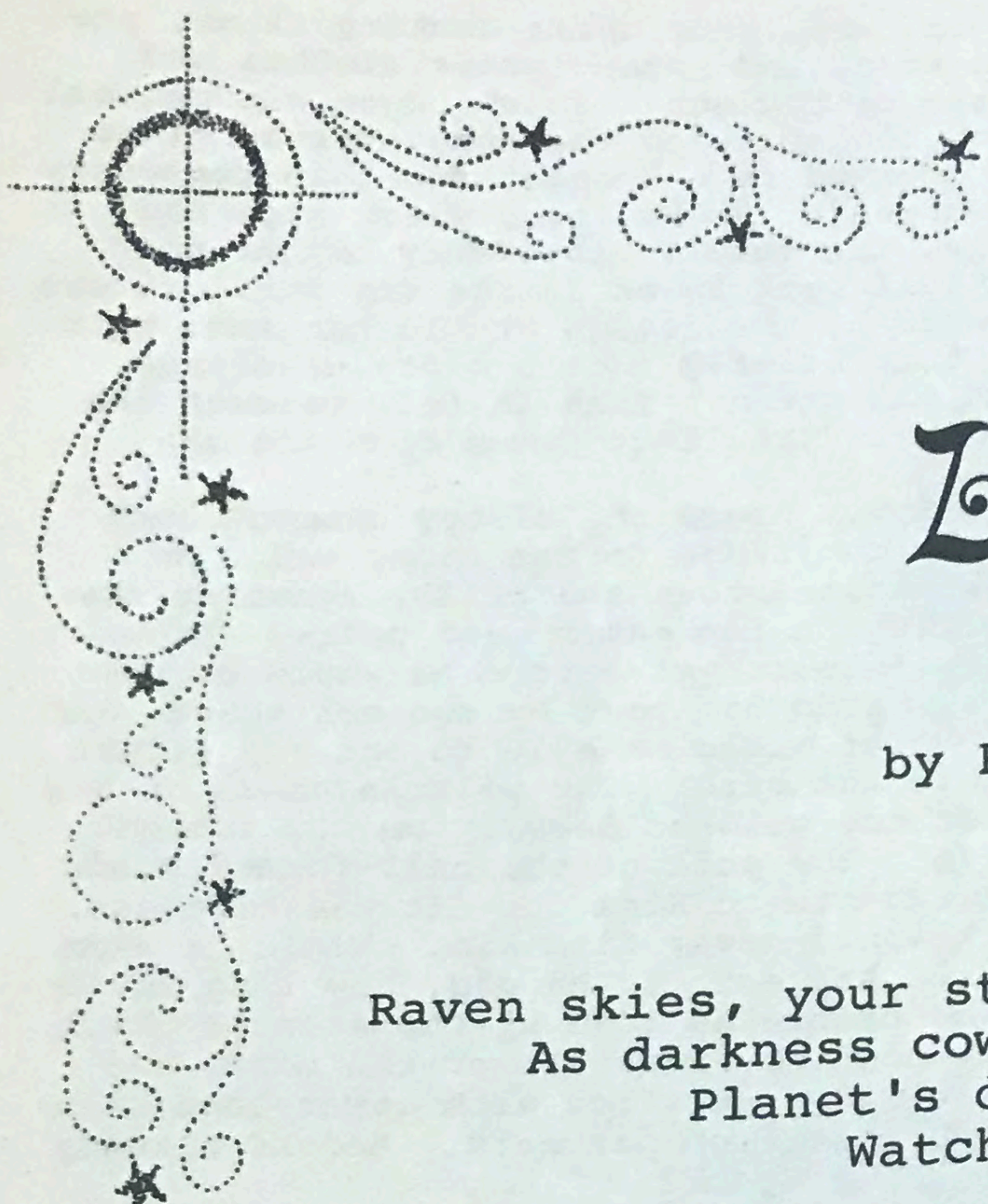
It would have been easy, so very easy, just to have given up, to have chosen death...closed off his mind and willed himself into oblivion, rather than suffer everything he had been through. But he had chosen survival for Kirk's sake. He had wanted to tell Kirk what he had discovered after he was forcibly taken off the Vengeance. So much time had passed since then; it was probably too late.

He began to reminisce, to remember how it had happened. For so long now, he had denied himself this; it was too painful. Now he allowed his mind to turn backwards, into the past...remembering...that last passionate night...Kirk leaving him, beaming down to Earth...the long, sleepless vigil, waiting for his return...then, Kirk's voice on the com, ordering him to pack his possessions and beam them to his new ship, the Enterprise. He began his task.

It was then that everything began to fall apart....

TO BE CONTINUED....?





Lovers

by Betsy Fisher

Raven skies, your stars enfold
As darkness cowers from the cold,
Planet's dawn, your grace foretold.
Watcher.

One golden man with eyes of light
Comes tumbling down, a star in flight
Seeking solace from the night,
Guardian.

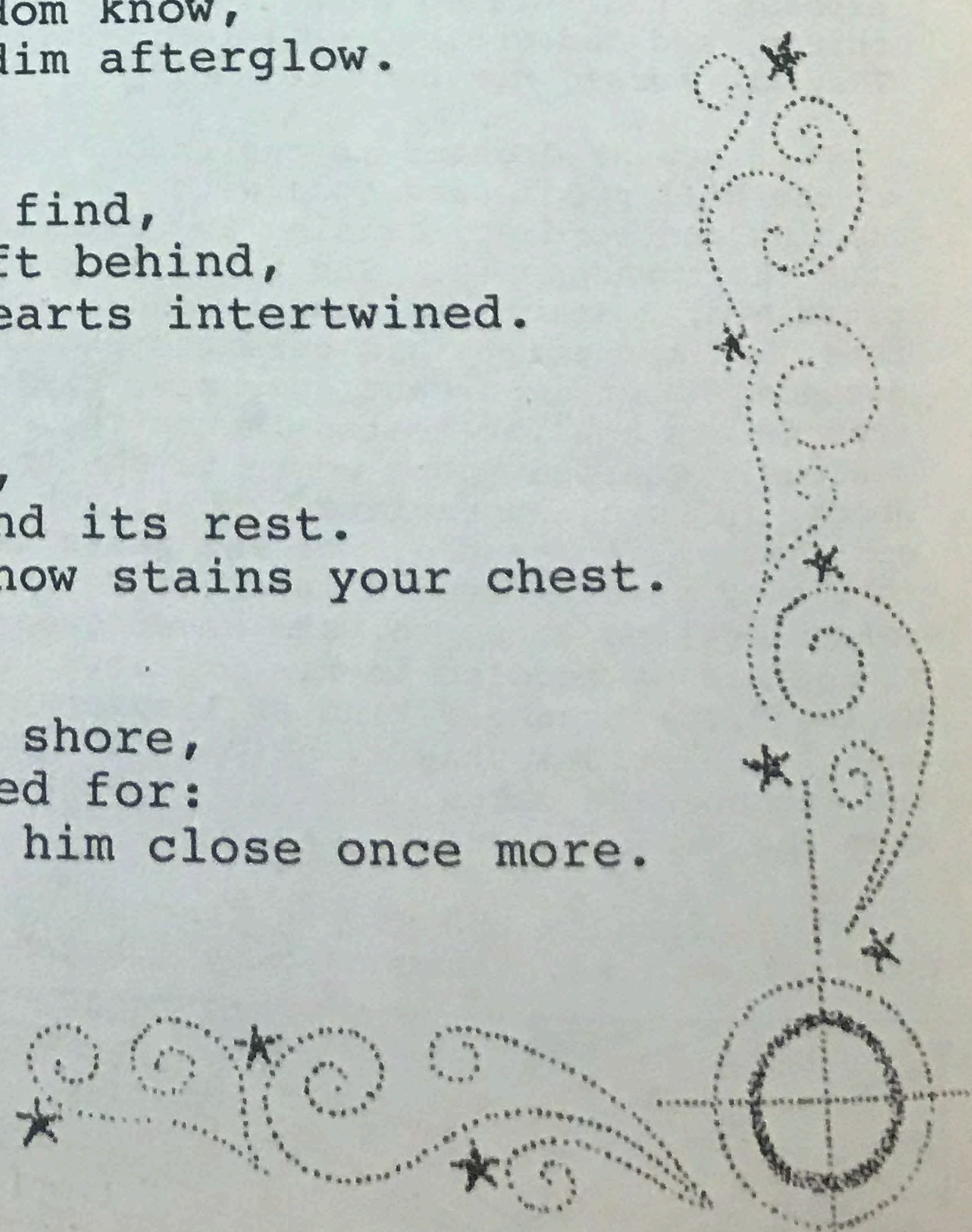
Wounded now, he yearns to flee,
For comfort cleaves to mystery,
His burning heart from pain be free.
Custodian.

From the breach you both must go,
A devotion life can seldom know,
Awash with Fate's dim afterglow.
Shepherd.

From all the sadness you may find,
And all the gladness left behind,
The surge of two hearts intertwined.
Keeper.

Soft return to night is best,
His golden love must find its rest.
His crimson blood now stains your chest.
Comforter.

As darkness falls on distant shore,
You know what you existed for:
The chance to hold him close once more.
Lover.





SETHRA DRAGON 84

